

Counting the Cost of Following Jesus

In all of life there is no more important question than this: "...What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). We must know and genuinely believe the gospel of salvation from our sins in Jesus Christ. In addition to his, we continue to need gospel grace as the foundation for growth in holiness or Christ-likeness (Romans 1:16-17). Growing in likeness to Jesus Christ is never without its challenges. We have a natural fallen tendency to want things our way, the easy way, i.e., something that doesn't take us out of our comfort zone. And yet, contrary to this, the scriptures teach that to grow in our Christian faith will require grace empowered effort and sacrifice. There is a cost to following Jesus. It's impossible to read the gospel accounts of Jesus' earthly life and ministry without coming to this conclusion. Former pastor and current President of Wheaton College, Phil Ryken, once wrote that it's as if Jesus is saying to his followers, "I love you and I have a difficult plan for your life." The biblical text that I want to unpack in this short series of articles is found in Luke 9:57-61.

Today, we'll consider that following Jesus must take....

—Priority over Worldly Comforts

The main thought in this passage centers on what it means to "follow Jesus." "As they were going along the road, someone said to [Jesus], 'I will follow you wherever you go.'" (Luke 9:57) In this narrative, Jesus is being accompanied by many who are called 'disciples' but it soon becomes obvious that there are some who are not fully committed. Although Luke doesn't identify the person who made this statement, Matthew's parallel account (Mt. 8:19-22), says that this man was a 'scribe', i.e., a Jewish teacher of the law. We know that many of the Jewish leaders were against the ministry of Jesus, but this scribe—at least in the moment—seems to be receptive to Jesus' teaching and declares his desire to follow him. But notice how Jesus responds. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

It's crucial to this portion of the text to ascertain what Jesus means by calling himself, "the Son of Man." This title was used by Jesus of himself more than any other designation.

Those who have counted these things say that this title is used 81 times in the gospels, 69 of those in the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Although much has been written on this, for our purposes we can say that Jesus used this title to speak of at least three things:

- The Son of Man is one who is spoken of by the prophets, who would come in the last days and who was given power and dominion over an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).
- The Son of Man is one who comes to live on earth on behalf of the salvation of his people which is inclusive of suffering and being mistreated by many (Luke 17:25; 19:10).
- The Son of Man is one who would have to die a sacrificial death (Luke 24:7; John 12:34).

Throughout the gospels we hear from Jesus how his life on earth will not be an easy one in many ways, including the fact that, the worldly comforts that many enjoy will not always be

available to him and his disciples (Mt. 12:1; Luke 9:3, 23-25; 10:1ff) . He will often have, “....no place to lay his head.” (Lk. 9:58) To be Jesus’ disciple will require a life of sacrifice.

As 21st century American Christians, we have blessings without number. We have many comforts of life and it’s not wrong to be thankful for and enjoy the blessings that God has given us. And yet, these comforts must never get in the way of following Jesus in whatever we’re commanded to do from his word, the Holy Scriptures. We would do well to count the cost. We’ll pick this up again in my next article.

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