

Luke 14:25-33

In this passage Jesus really does lay down a challenge for us as his followers. He pulls no punches; he makes no bones about the fact that if we are to be genuine followers, then we must be prepared to make sacrifices. I quote, *'So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.'* He certainly doesn't sugar-coat the invitation to become one of his followers but he does expect us to take up that challenge.

Can you imagine a politician campaigning for an election telling people that if they vote for him, they can expect higher taxes, lower wages and social security subsidies to be slashed? Probably not conducive to winning votes, but Jesus is actually doing something quite similar.

It reminds me of the ad that Ernest Shackleton was supposed to have posted before his Expedition to the South Pole. 'Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.' Now, there is some doubt whether that ad actually existed, but the point is this, those men who signed up for that expedition would have known precisely what was in store of them. Shackleton would have made that quite clear. And yet they signed up; they chose to become one of his followers.

So in the same way, Jesus challenges us to become one of his followers and in doing so, be prepared to make sacrifices. So what does this really mean? Just what is this challenge that Jesus is laying down before us? I want to make a couple of points. Firstly, just as Jesus relates how you wouldn't embark on the building of a tower without first sitting down and estimating the cost, in other words, doing some sort of a budget, so we need to prepare ourselves. And I think this is not so much about being physically prepared as being mentally prepared. We need to be aware of what is expected of us, how we intend to fulfil those expectations.

The second point is that I don't believe we need to be frightened by this challenge. Now Jesus is quite provocative here: *'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'* But Jesus was often a little on the extreme side when he wanted to make a point. After all, it was Jesus who said, *'If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.'* Mathew 21:8,9. A tad on the harsh side if you take it literally.

In this case, these words of Jesus are a provocative way of saying that our priority in life must be to Jesus and to his work of completing God's kingdom here on earth. They are simply a provocative way of saying that as followers of Jesus our responsibility extends

beyond our flesh-and-blood family to the entire human family. They are simply a provocative way of saying that if we want to follow Jesus, we must follow him not only on Sunday morning but also in our day to day lives Monday to Saturday.

Here I want to emphasise the point that we don't need to be frightened by this challenge. Just because we are challenged to make God a top priority in our lives, it doesn't mean we have to be a Mother Teresa or a Francis of Assisi. Our priority just needs to be reflected in the way we live our lives, and most importantly, the way we treat one another. Let me tell you about a couple of people.

Waleed Sadruddin was a 17-year-old who lived in Portland, Oregon in 1989. Across the street from his home there was a crack house. When he saw his friends getting into drugs and joining street gangs, he decided to do something. He organised his peers into a high school fraternity, as a positive alternative to gangs. They sponsored dances, cleaned up graffiti in the area, helped out with homework for those who needed it. It was nothing major but what a difference it made in their community.

Then there was Charlie DeLeo. Charlie grew up as a tough kid on New York's East Side. After returning from Vietnam, he got a job as maintenance man at the Statue of Liberty. Part of his job was to take care of the torch in the statue's hand. He had to make sure the sodium lights were always working and that the 200 glass windows in the torch were always clean.

Charlie dedicated his work to the Lord. He saw his work as being of a service to the people. He took pride in his work and he regarded the large torch as his chapel. Charlie also received a commendation from the Red Cross for donating his 65th pint of blood. He wasn't wealthy by any stretch of the imagination but he gave a significant percentage of his earnings to Mother Teresa's work in India.

So you see, Waleed and Charlie are people just like you and me. They were motivated to make some sort of a sacrifice and to give something of themselves in order to improve the lot of others. That's all God requires of us. We are not expected to be giants in the field of social service. We are not expected to change the world through our own actions, but we are expected to do our little bit, and as I have said on numerous occasions, if we all do our little bit, then together we will make a difference; we just might change the landscape.

I remind you of the quote by Martin Luther King, 'Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"' Simple, straightforward and pertinent to the challenge Jesus lays down for us in terms of being a followers of his and being justified in calling ourselves Christians.

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