

Count the Cost of Discipleship

✠ **No fireworks for the unresponsive** (vv.51-56)

✠ **No followers from poor priorities** (vv.57-62)

In the name of Jesus, our resolute Savior, dear fellow disciples of our Lord:

Do you remember why in last Sunday's sermon "*Jesus strictly warned [His disciples] not to tell...anyone [He was the Christ]*" (Luke 9:21 NIV)? We talked quite a bit about the fact that everyone wanted Jesus as an earthly Bread King to make life easy and rid them of their hated Roman conquerors. After Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000, they wanted to make Him a king "*by force.*" (John 6:15) Even the Twelve were so wrapped up in this foolishness that Jesus compelled them to leave the crowds behind. That kind of enthusiastic following could only prevent Jesus from His soul-saving mission of suffering and dying to save us all from our sins. Still today to be a follower of Jesus means to **Count the Cost of Discipleship**. If the Twelve needed this lesson in commitment, don't we? Since we just celebrated 4th of July Independence Day in America, this is a good time to consider when we follow Jesus, He allows...

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Why did Jesus call them "*the sons of thunder*" (Mark 3:17)? Was it from this foolish question of brothers James and John? Unlike other Jews of His day Jesus did not go around the territory of the half-breed Samaritans jammed in between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. They were brought in centuries before by the cruel Assyrians and mixed their old pagan culture with worship of the true God. Jews hated Samaritans, and Samaritans hated Jews. But Jesus loved them both and meant to bless them as He set out on His *Resolute Journey* to Jerusalem to suffer and die for Jews and non-Jews alike.

When Jesus sent a few disciples to get things ready, the Samaritan village refused to welcome them because they were headed toward the Jewish capital. No doubt James and John thought they would be doing Jesus a favor to vindicate Him publicly for such shameful treatment: "*Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?*" Some of the ancient manuscripts include the NIV footnote that this is what the LORD's prophet Elijah had done. For that time and place it may have been the LORD's will on ancient Israelites who rejected God's Word through the mouth of prophets like Elijah. But God was very patient. Now Jesus had to tell James and John, "*You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*" (NIV footnote)

We're not talking here about self-righteous road rage where you may wish you had a missile launcher on your car for the guy that cut you off in traffic. The rising death toll on Minnesota highways certainly reflects how we reap what we sow. (Galatians 6:7) Unless we worship the God of the Bible, we cannot enjoy the civility of Christ-like love. Unfortunately, this destructive attitude can worm its way into practicing Christians too, just as it empowered the impatient, unloving attitude of James and John. Jesus' rebuke was certainly not a compliment for disciples who should have been known as the sons of God, instead of the "*sons of thunder.*" Christian havoc and vengeance on their enemies still lingers long centuries after the Crusades which in some cases did more damage to fellow Christians of the Eastern Church than to Moslems. On the flipside, Christians in our day in republics of the former Soviet Union report persecution by the Orthodox Church when they try to worship our Lord Christ according to the dictates of their own conscience. "*A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.*" (Matthew 10:36 NIV) We are called to suffer with Christ. For this reason, to **Count the Cost of Discipleship** means we can expect **No fireworks on the unresponsive**. Instead of the Samaritans, James and John got blasted by Jesus' rebuke, "*and they went on to another village.*"

† No followers from poor priorities (vv.57-62)

Most of us would like to think we are at least polite, or as we say, “Minnesota nice.” We don’t tend to get too riled up about anything. But this is where we also can become an easy target for the old evil foe from hell without even realizing it. We’re like the newly washed car under a flock of birds in that *Far Side* comic strip. The driver didn’t see a big bull’s-eye on the roof. The birds sure did.

Luke’s Gospel tells us about three would-be followers of Jesus. At first they seem to have a desirable enthusiasm for **Discipleship**. Who would want to discourage them? But remember, our Lord Jesus can see into their hearts and attitudes as surely as He knows all our thoughts long before we think them and long after we’ve forgotten. That’s why **priorities** are so prominent when He tells us to **Count the Cost of Discipleship**. As the ancient Jewish proverb was inspired by the Holy Spirit: *“The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.”* (Proverbs 17:3 NIV)

First came an eager volunteer. *As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”* Wouldn’t we want more people to come and volunteer? Not so fast! **Count the Cost of Discipleship**. *Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* Every day Jesus was living the harsh reality that His heavenly Father gave homes to the animals and birds, but as God’s own Son, Jesus had to live in humiliation and deep dependence on God for His daily bread. Many preachers keep fooling people into thinking Christianity is a way to get rich. Certainly it works when you apply the principles of God’s Word to real life. But Christ wants us to **Count the Cost of Discipleship** which includes the hatred of the Christ-hating world. We must never forget that Christians still lose everything even their earthly lives in persecution around the world. Christ is to be our all in all, not life on “Easy Street.”

He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Anything wrong with performing the last acts of respect for loved ones? Not unless it comes between us and our Lord Christ. Does your sinful nature twist grief into an excuse for not going to Bible study or worship? Then grief has got to go away for Jesus’ sake. We dare not take up residence on “Downhearted Lane.” Christ came to carry our griefs and sorrows. They belong to Him, not us. As one writer put it, “The first step back to God is the step down to our knees in heartfelt repentance,” for *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* (Psalm 51:17 NIV) The high **Cost of Discipleship** includes our sinful pride along with all grief and sorrow.

One more volunteer stepped up and said, *“I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”* When Elisha asked to do the same thing in our Old Testament Lesson (1 Kings 19:14-21), Elijah let him because his attitude was completely different. Elisha paid **the cost of Discipleship** by burning his plowing equipment to sacrifice his oxen and grill out for his neighbors. He was “burning his bridges” to never go back home and always follow the LORD. Jesus must have seen something different in this volunteer’s heart where his family meant a wrong turn down “Distraction Drive.” Jesus illustrated with a familiar picture of someone trying to plow a field while looking backwards. My Granddad used to tell how his father taught him and his brothers on their Nebraska farm to plant the straightest rows of corn by focusing on a distant point on the far side of the field. That’s how he taught me to mow a straight line with a lawnmower. Likewise, if you try to drive a car while looking out the rear window, you’ll soon be in the ditch or a head-on collision.

To **Count the Cost of Discipleship** we need to be as resolute as Jesus was to suffer and die for our sins. We cannot work such solid commitment in our own hearts, but Jesus wants us to repent of our waywardness. His sacrifice washes away our **unresponsive, poor priorities**. God counts us as resolute in Christ. Such grace motivates and empowers us to follow Him all the way home to heaven. Amen.