

“He Cannot Be My Disciple”: Jesus’ Conditions for Following Him

By Marco Scouvert



I recently traveled across the country to attend an international conference for the association that our local church is part of. When I arrived at the rental agency, they presented me with certain terms and conditions for my contract. I needed to be at least 25 years old and possess a valid driver’s license. I had to agree that I would be the only driver. And I was required to give them my credit card for a security hold to cover additional charges I incurred. If I was unable to

meet their conditions and/or unwilling to agree to their terms, I could not rent from them.

Likewise, there are terms and conditions you must agree to and meet if you want to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. On his final trip to Jerusalem, Jesus announced three of them to a crowd accompanying him along the way. They are recorded for us in Luke 14:25-33.

1. Give Your Highest Allegiance to Jesus

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters . . . he cannot be my disciple” (v. 26).

Jesus’ words are audacious and shocking. But what do they mean? Jesus is not calling us to resent our relations, wish evil upon them, or seek to harm them. Rather, he is saying that we should prioritize our relationship with him over all other people and be devoted to him above others. “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37).

If your relationship to any person, even those nearest and dearest to you, conflicts with your commitment to Jesus or threatens your obedience to him, then you must choose Christ over that person. Jesus requires that we give him supreme loyalty and seek to please him above all others. We must be willing to offend and disregard others to such an extent that it may seem like we are “hating” them.

2. Be Willing to Die for Jesus

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate . . . his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (vv. 26-27).

To become a disciple of Jesus, you must stop living as the master of your own life. In fact, you must stop living. You must die. As Bible teacher David Guzik has written: “[Jesus’ words] probably horrified his listeners. In the Roman world, before a man died on a cross, he had to carry his cross (or at least the horizontal beam of the cross) to the place of execution. . . . Carrying a cross always led to death on a cross. No one carried a cross for fun. The first hearers of Jesus didn’t need an explanation of the cross; they knew it was

an unrelenting instrument of torture, death, and humiliation” (“What is Required to be Saved?,” www.enduringword.com).

Living as a disciple of Jesus means abandoning anything that hinders you from submitting under the rule of King Jesus and following him. This involves giving up all obvious sin in order to obey Christ. It also includes forgoing even good things that compete with his reign over you, and denying yourself desires and plans that conflict with Jesus’ will. More literally, this means being willing to experience rejection, humiliation, dishonor, pain, and even death in the path of obedience to Christ.

3. Surrender Everything You Own to Jesus

“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (v. 33).

In addition to laying claim to our relationships and personal interests, Jesus demands ownership of our stuff. The word translated “renounce” literally means “say goodbye to” (cf. Luke 9:61). Jesus calls us to bid farewell to all we have. These are the “terms of peace” (v. 32; cf. Deut. 20:10-15) Jesus calls for if you want to be his disciple.

When you follow Christ, you cease to be an owner and become a manager of your money and possessions. It all belongs to Jesus now, and you are to use your things as he wishes to accomplish his purposes. If he leads you to sell one of your possessions and give that money to a needy believer (Acts 2:44-45) or sell all that you have and give it to the poor (Luke 18:22), you should be willing to follow. And if he guides you to open your home for an evangelistic Bible study or a church meeting (Rom. 16:23), you should be willing to do so.

In seeking to take this demand seriously and obey it, my parents-in-law went around their home, telling themselves item by item, “This couch belongs to Jesus. This chair belongs to Jesus. This bed belongs to Jesus.” And they committed to immediately give up anything if they believed the Lord was calling them to that. The former might be helpful for us, and the latter is exactly what Jesus requires.

Count the Costs

As you can see, there is a great cost to becoming a disciple of Jesus. As it has been said, it will cost you everything. But consider two additional, related thoughts. First, there is a greater cost to not following Jesus: losing your soul and being excluded from life in God’s coming kingdom. Second, there is a great reward for following him: saving your soul and living forever in the new world to come.

Listen one more time to Jesus: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (Luke 9:23-25); “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive many times more in this life, and in the age to come, eternal life” (18:29-30).

So count the costs, prize the reward, and make the wise choice to follow Jesus.

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