

4. Lessons from Would-be Disciples

Biblical material: Matt. 8:19-22; 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-23; Luke 4:16-30; 18:18-30; John 3:1-21.

Quotes

- Ours is the pain of constantly pitching our tent and folding it up again, of befriending strangers and bidding them good-bye, of loving the world but never being truly satisfied with it, of pouring our heart and soul into a project others have begun and still others will finish. If we would not be torn in two by the tension of this truth, we must learn to live provisionally—to measure the road well. We need to make the most of occasions when we can gather by the roadside to break bread and compare directions. Joy must be discovered in the going as we never really arrive, not even in a lifetime. *Kristine Malins*
- Preaching is to much avail, but practice is far more effective. A godly life is the strongest argument you can offer the skeptic. *Hosea Ballou*
- Those who teach by their doctrine must teach by their life, or else they pull down with one hand what they build up with the other. *Matthew Henry*
- Christianity does not consist in any partial amendment of our lives, any particular moral virtues, but in an entire change of our natural temper, a life wholly devoted to God. *William Law*

Questions

What is the problem with promises? How does Jesus react to great professions of commitment? How do such reactions to would-be disciples reveal the true character of Jesus' mission? In terms of commitment, are Jesus' demands unreasonable? How does God look in all of this—is there potential for misunderstanding? How would you counsel these disciples?

Discussion/ Comment

The memory text does not really seem to endorse family ministries! “Another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’ Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 9:61, 62, RSV). Surely God would not mind a quick farewell before we left home? What is really going on here?

The key is in the lesson title: “would-be disciples.” That is, disciples who made a profession of discipleship, but found excuses not to become disciples. Mt. 8:19-22 reveals the case of those who are proud to make extravagant promises, but lack follow-through. They may even mean what they say, but when problems come, they find it easy to excuse their non-compliance.

“Here is a case of someone who, not specifically called by Jesus, volunteered instead. Notice, too, just how intense his profession was. *He would follow the Lord anywhere.* It is easy, even for a true follower of the Lord, to make all sorts of pronouncements about being faithful (Luke 22:33); it is not so easy, however, to follow up on them (vss. 55-61).” (*Sunday's lesson*).

“Promises, promises,” Jesus seems to be saying. Think of “all the promises we make, from the cradle to the grave.” And just how much are they worth? In today's society, we are impressed by image and claim. Like the snake-oil salesman of old, many are peddling a “pocketful promises, all lies and jest.” Yet “a man believes what he wants to believe, and

disregards the rest.” For in many ways it’s simpler: “Living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see.”

So what of promises? On what are they based? How do we evaluate promises? In a world of many promises, how do we determine which ones we can rely on? Ultimately it is a question of trustworthiness—the ability of the one who promises to fulfill. When it comes to God, we can be absolutely certain that he will fulfill all his promises. “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19 NIV). Consequently, we as God’s trusting disciples can have complete confidence—because we know what kind of person God is. In the words of Adoniram Judson, “My future is as bright as the promises of God.”

So if we wish to be trustworthy disciples of God, we must demonstrate his trustworthiness to the world—to all who watch and evaluate, for we are a spectacle...

Ellen White Comments

The apostasy of these professed followers of Christ at such a time, would have been more than the twelve could have endured in addition to their great grief and the terrible ruin of their fondest hopes. The example of those who turned from him, might, in that hour of horror, have carried all the rest with them. But Jesus brought about this crisis while he was still present to comfort and strengthen his chosen, and prepare them for what was to follow. When the hooting rabble scorned Him who was doomed to the cross, the disciples were not overwhelmed with surprise at this insult to their Master, for they had seen the fickleness of those who had once followed him. When those who had professed to love the Master turned from him in the time of his trouble, the disciples remembered that the same thing had occurred before, for less reason. They had tested the inconstant favor of the world, and hung not their faith upon the opinions of others. Jesus wisely prepared the minds of his faithful few for the great trial of his betrayal and death. {2SP 290}

The Lord calls for minutemen, men who will be prepared to speak words in season and out of season that will arrest the attention and convict the heart. The kingdom of God consisteth not in outward show. Light will not be received by following selfish plans, but by looking unto Jesus, following Christ’s leadings, not the suppositions of men. The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. It often happens that circumstances arise which demand prompt action. And sometimes precious opportunities have been lost because of delay. {ChL 73-4}

Man will find rest in complying with the conditions of the invitation. And the call is not to a few, but to all. Christ is the Redeemer of the world. His greatest message to the world was, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” “If any man will come after me,” he said, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Jesus accepted that cross, with all its humiliation and suffering, that he might make it possible for every member of the human family to follow in his footsteps. He requires of human beings nothing which, in his own humanity, he has not himself borne. He knows that the strength of man in itself is wholly inefficient; but he also knows that the provision made is ample and abundant, able to strengthen him, and make him capable of responding to the call. {RH, December 6, 1898}