

A Christian must be a disciple who pays the price to follow Jesus, but in order to follow Jesus, Christians must understand that Jesus is the Christ of God, what this truth means and requires, and why the cost of following Jesus is worth it.

Introduction – Is there anything in this world that is basically free, but will cost you everything? The only thing that comes to mind that is free but will cost you *everything* is getting married.

I. Who is Jesus?

A. Wrong answers from the crowds (vv. 18-19)

Jesus excited people because it appeared he was a great prophet, like John the Baptist, or even Elijah (the greatest prophet of the Israelite kingdom period). Based on the OT, they expected Elijah to return to usher in the new age of the Spirit (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6). Jews also had an OT expectation that a prophet like Moses would come in the last days to usher in the kingdom of God (Dt 18:15).

B. The correct answer from the disciples (vv. 20-21)

Those who knew Jesus best realized he must be more than a prophet. Peter confesses that Jesus is not just another prophet on par with the rest. He is the Christ. The words “Messiah” (Hebrew) and “Christ” (Greek) both mean “anointed one” or the “Lord’s anointed.” It implies one who is set apart for special service, particularly as a king. Jesus is not merely an anointed one like David or Elijah, but *the* Anointed One.

II. What does it mean that Jesus is “the Christ”?

A. For Jesus: the Christ must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and be raised (v. 22)

1. The Jews were looking for the Messiah to be a geo-political and military deliverer. The idea of a rejected and suffering Christ was unexpected. He will not triumph over the Roman occupiers. He will be rejected by his own people. They will betray and kill the Christ of God. Such a prediction must have smashed to pieces the disciples’ expectations.

2. What are the many things that the Son of Man will suffer? He will be an atoning and saving sacrifice for God’s people. He will face opposition from people and from the spiritual forces of Satan, culminating in his arrest for political sedition and blasphemy. As an innocent man, he will be railroaded in several corrupt court trials and finally put to death by crucifixion. Yet all coming to pass according to the good purpose and plan of God, so that he might accomplish salvation by defeating death in his bodily resurrection.

B. For Disciples: there is a high price to pay in following Jesus (v. 23)

1. A Hard Saying: true disciples must practice the art of self-crucifixion. This is the first principle of Christian discipleship.

2. What does it mean to “deny” oneself? To gladly trade control and authority over your own life for the lordship of Christ. Jesus commands his disciples to deny not only certain things, but their very selves. Later Jesus described this self-denial as “hating one’s own life” (Lk 14:26). Jesus requires those who would follow him to reject their former life based on self-interest and self-fulfillment, and choose instead a life of willing, sacrificial obedience of Christ.

3. What does it mean to “take up your cross daily”? To completely deny yourself and pursue Jesus on the *via dolorosa* (way of suffering). It literally means to carry your own cross to the place where others will crucify you! Believers must faithfully endure “Christian” trials—those hardships we could (more or less) avoid/escape if we stopped following Jesus (Acts 14:22). We

ought to daily crucify our self. Cross-bearing is not a rite of passage. It is a new way of life. Thank God he provides for us the power to take up the cross by his Spirit.

4. What does it mean to “follow” Jesus? To believe, revere and obey the teachings of Jesus, including those regarding his identity as Lord and God. To follow his lead as example. To join the company of his disciples who are also following Jesus.

III. Why pay the price to follow Jesus Christ?

A. If you lose your life for Jesus’ sake, then you will actually save it (v. 24)

This is a paradox. Jesus says that you will only find life by losing it! In a sense you must lose control, or better, you must give up trying to keep control of your life, and yield control to Jesus. Yes, it’s scary, but Jesus promises it’s the only way to save your life. If you won’t, whether you’re too proud or too afraid to lose your life, then either way you’re placing yourself on the throne of your life, to rule your little kingdom of self. Jesus promises that all kings and queens of little kingdoms will lose their lives, especially at the last judgment (cf. Lk 9:26; Jn 12:25).

B. If you gain the whole world, then you will lose your only lasting treasure: your soul (v. 25)

Jesus makes this “wager” explicit. Those who wager to win the world will lose even when they win! Because to win the world is to seek after life in this world, to put down the cross and stop following Jesus on his way of suffering and self-denial. Such a wager is a losing bet. Gaining all the world has to offer is infinitely less valuable than one’s eternal destiny in relation to God.

C. If you are ashamed of Humiliation Jesus, then Exaltation Jesus will be ashamed of you (v. 26)

Being ashamed of Jesus is another way of disowning Jesus and his gospel, with the opposite being to acknowledge Jesus. To both secular and religious, Jesus seems to be a loser and worthy of shame. But Jesus’ resurrection glory puts his rejection, suffering, and death in perspective. He will rise again and come in glory on the last day. He will be exalted above all. His lowly shame will be transformed into highest honor. Jesus is saying that we need to have an eternal perspective, to take the long view, to value what is valuable in the end.

D. If you pay the price, then God may bless you with a glimpse of glory even in this life (v. 27)

Jesus will suffer in order to be glorified. Glimpses of God’s kingdom encourage us that suffering, cross-bearing, and death are worth the sacrifice. God prepares disciples for the hard life of following Jesus by showing us glimpses of his glory. The kingdom of God has finally arrived in Jesus, and it will soon come in power!

Conclusion – Jesus confronts you head-on with your shame, and then he gently performs heart surgery, removing the shame rooted in fear of what others might think of you by taking your shame upon himself. He was our substitute. The cross is the antidote to our shame. When you consider the great love of Jesus on the cross, it will stir in you an indescribable gratitude, a deep and lasting sense of indebtedness for the one who died to release you from the fear of men and the fear of losing yourself. The price Jesus paid to forgive your sin and cover your shame will move you to deny yourself, love him more, and give you courage to take up your cross daily and follow him, even when the fear encroaches upon your heart.