

## SPECTATOR OR FOLLOWER?

Luke 14:25-33

This is the age of the professional who judges the success of an event or cause by the crowd it attracts. A football game is just another game, unless the tickets are sold out. A book is judged largely by its sales. A religious meeting is judged by the attendance. To the professional eye, the crowd is the thing, even though it is made up of people who only come to watch.

There won't be any game, however, unless there are men on the field who play their hearts out. There won't be any track meet without people who run to win. There won't be any religious effectiveness--no matter how many people are enrolled as members of the church and how many attend its services--unless there are those who conscientiously refuse the role of spectator and resolutely accept or even seek that of participants.

Jesus Christ made it perfectly clear that following Him requires participation. Following Christ calls for discipleship on the part of those who have counted the cost of being a disciple and have determined to follow Him to the end.

Judged by the crowds He attracted, Christ's early ministry could be called a huge success. Five thousand men, besides the women and children, came to hear Him in the desert. People pressed in upon Him in such great numbers at the shores of the lake that He had to go out in a boat to address them. If that is what He wanted, He had it.

If His followers at that time were as much impressed by crowds as some of those who claim adherence to Christ today, they were probably congratulating themselves and saying to each other, "We have got it made." To their dismay Christ made it perfectly clear that He was not impressed by crowds.

Our Lord did not despise crowds. He did not turn the crowds away. He was not the least bit snobbish. He loved people and was concerned about all of them. He loved people to such an extent that He forgot Himself entirely. Forgetting Himself, He could not hold still for any well-intended attempt by the crowds to make Him a king or to turn His mission into a quest for bread, easily provided by His divine power.

Christ was interested in the populace but not in popular acclaim. It probably tempted Him as it tempts us, but He never yielded to it. His mission of providing salvation came first, and it would bring Him one day to a hill outside the city wall with three crosses upon it. The crowds were there that day, too, but not to applaud Him.

The Lord Jesus was on His way to the cross. Among those that were following Him were many who did not have any conception of the real meaning of discipleship. This is true of many who profess to follow Him today. He turned to them and said: "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." He did not say that one cannot be something else--for example: a church member, an officer in the church, a prominent citizen, or a member of some "leading family"--but He said: "He cannot be my disciple."

It is quite evident that many professing Christians do not have any real intention of following and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. They treat their church membership just as they do their insurance policies. They have never studied the terms, and do nothing about it except occasionally and spasmodically to pay their "dues." They are

content if only their lives are barely kept above the level of scandal. They are not concerned about the fact that Christ demands full surrender, unfaltering loyalty and faithful obedience.

To be a disciple of Christ means more than merely to be forgiven of sin. Church members used to have clearly defined ideas as to the definition of a Christian. Doctor George W. McDaniel said: "Whoever accepts Jesus as his personal Saviour and submits to Him as his Lord and treats the New Testament as the law of his life is a Christian." Doctor J. T. Villers said: "A Christian is not a saint preserved for future happiness, but a sinner redeemed for present service." Doctor J. E. Dillard said: "A Christian is a person who reminds other people of Jesus." This business of being a Christian is a serious matter and demands our best. To claim to be a Christian is to bring one's self under obligation to live and act as a Christian should live and act, and to be all that the term Christian implies. The terms Christian and disciple should be synonymous in the life and experience of a believer. It means something to be a Christian. A disciple is a learner, one who follows after another and who recognizes another as Master. The disciples were learners, and they crowned Jesus Christ as the Lord and Master in their lives.

The work of Christ in the world has been done by people who were not content to be mere spectators. The cause of Christ, that is, proclaiming His death for the sins of the world and living by faith in Him, has not been carried forward by undisciplined, wonder-seeking crowds. It has depended upon the few people who were willing and ready, not only to accept the name, but also to pay the price of being a disciple.

Christ was talking to individuals in that crowd, knowing that crowds prefer the role of spectator, when He said: "If any man come to Me, and wants to be a follower of Mine, he has to abandon the role of spectator and become a follower." Christ does not want onlookers, but He does want participants; He does not want admirers, but He does want witnesses; He does not want spectators, but He does want followers.

Christ counted the cost and found it to be high. It meant doing the work His Father had given Him to do at the cost of His own personal preference, and of His own life. In the garden He prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). It was a bitter cup that He drank, dying in all innocence to atone for the guilt that lies heavy upon mankind. It is hard for a man to pay the price when he knows that he deserves to pay it. To die like a common criminal, however, knowing that He is fully innocent is terribly hard. To such an innocent death Christ willingly gave Himself for us. He died for us in order that, through believing on Him, we might have life. Christ said: "The disciple is not above his master." A disciple must be willing to pay the price of following as the Master has paid the price of leading the way.

How do you tell the value of an object? Most people would answer, "By the price you pay. You get what you pay for." Plausible as this answer may be, it is not always true. How about that diamond on your finger? Can any jeweler tell you something you could not possibly pay for: love, affection, and a personal pledge to undying faithfulness.

This fact we often forget when we put a value on life itself. How much value do you put upon your life? How much value do you put upon it when you devote the whole of it to acquiring possessions, or expressing your own thoughts and feelings, or even developing your talents? Does your life mean anything to you in terms of how you got it? Did it come to you just by a chance event of nature or is it the gift of the living God? Your answer will make a difference in your whole life.

Christ gave His life for you. Accept that fact and your whole life will be different. To know Christ is to follow Him. To follow Him is to be a disciple. To be a disciple is to count the cost, to put a new value on life, to pay the price of that new life-- and to do it gladly.

Christ is not satisfied simply with those fine phrases you use when you talk about Him, nor with the promises of consideration some day of the claims He makes upon you. He is not satisfied with anything less than commitment now as a disciple or follower.

Doctor Elton Trueblood told the story of a man who applied for membership in a church. He told the pastor that, being a busy man, he wanted to belong to a fashionable church, hear good music, and listen to good sermons. He did not have any intention of doing any work or giving any time as an active participant in the work of the church. The pastor replied, "Sir, you have come to the wrong place. The one you want is six blocks ahead." The man hurried to this place, if for no other reason than to find out what it was, and walked right into a cemetery.

Christ claims authority over every realm of life. He is not willing to control certain areas, and leave us to do as we please with other areas of life. We cannot give Him the keys to part of the rooms of the heart and keep the others. He requires all the keys, or He will not accept any. "He must be Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all." There must not be any divided allegiance, I shall never forget the challenge of Dr. John R. Sampey, who said repeatedly: "Let's give all the keys to the Lord Jesus." No Christian can have perfect peace and permanent joy until he surrenders every area of his life to the Lord Jesus. Christ asks of each of us, who would be His followers, a supreme love for Him, a willing acquiescence in God's will, and a complete abandonment to the doing of that will.

Christ never attempted to recruit men and women under false pretenses. He never gave the impression that He was calling people to an easy task. Indeed, Christ did not come into the world to make life easy; He came into the world to save men and make them what they ought to be. So He turned to the crowd that was following after Him, and listed four categories of people that He wanted as personnel in His great program of world-wide evangelism. He wanted:

#### I. Learners Who Would Follow At Any Cost.

Christ cannot do anything with and through people who are not prepared and willing to learn at any cost. Christ made it clear that if we are going to follow Him, we must be prepared to learn lessons that will involve sacrifice:

##### 1. In human relationships.

If you are going to follow Christ into some places of service, you must be willing to sacrifice some human relations. Sometimes it means giving up those who are nearest and dearest to you. Christ must have the first place in your life and work.

##### 2. In human reputation.

Christ asks us to take up that cross that spells death to self-glory. You can't follow Christ and be popular with the worldly-minded crowds.

##### 3. In human resources.

## II. Builders Who Would Labor At Any Cost.

Our hearts should be challenged afresh by this simple statement, which is full of tremendous meaning: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying: "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Following Christ has a price. Count the cost before you leap. Otherwise you will make a fool of yourself as did the man who started to build and found his neighbors jeering at him: "There is the man who started to build and could not finish."

Not only must the building be spiritually conceived and constructed, but it must be sacrificially completed. One of the great tragedies in church life today is the unfinished tasks, the defective obedience, and the incompleted work of the members.

## III. Soldiers Who Would Battle At Any Cost.

"Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?"

He is saying: "Are you prepared to be a soldier who will not flinch in the face of the enemy of apparently superior power?"

## IV. Witnesses Who Will Testify At Any Cost.

Are you willing and ready to testify for the Lord with your lips and your life?

Christ tells us that following Him is costly. He does not ask you if you can afford to pay the price. He tells you plainly and simply that you must either pay the price or forego the privilege of following Him. In love He says, "You are my man, my woman, my boy, my girl, For you I gave my life. Give me yours."