

TAKING CHRIST SERIOUSLY

"And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" Matthew 8:19-20.

Christ intended for people to take Him seriously. He never said anything to indicate the contrary. He never sought to compromise any ideal in order to win adherents to His cause. He urged all who thought of becoming His followers to seriously consider the conditions of such discipleship. His challenge to prospective disciples included self-denial, sacrifice, the enduring of hardship, withstanding severe opposition, and the acceptance of adventure and risk. Many people, however, have sought to tone down the message of Christ and have made of it a half-way affair. We have small villages along our highways, appropriately named "Midway", being equally distant from two larger centers. Many today have a religion which reminds one of these villages because it is midway the ideals of Christ and the ideas of the world. Christ often warned people against a shallow conception of His challenge and urged them to count the cost before attempting to follow Him. He described those who would not take Him seriously. There were many then, as today, who were willing to admire Him, to flatter Him, and to give Him lip service, but they would not take into consideration the difficulties and dangers involved in being a true follower of Him. He said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Through the centuries Christ has often been misrepresented. His name has been claimed by self-centered individuals and groups. Many have tried to walk beneath His banner seeking personal benefits. But after 19 centuries He stands before the world as the only hope of the individual and of civilization. We surely need to take Him seriously.

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This man was attracted to the Saviour and impressed by His words, but evidently he had not counted the cost of discipleship. Christ pointed out to him what was involved in following Him. We are not told what effect these words had on this man. He may have accepted the challenge and followed Christ, or he may have turned away. In this incident we see an attempt of Christ to clear up false ideas as to discipleship among those contemplating acceptance of Him as Leader. He did not want any followers laboring under false impressions as to what His way of life meant.

In the light of present conditions in the United States, it is quite plain that the majority of people are not making an earnest effort to apply the teachings of Christ either in their own lives or to the conditions which surround them.

I. Wherein do we fail to take Christ seriously?

It is easy to make this inquiry. It is well for us to open the instructions of Christ at almost any point and compare the teachings found therein with our appreciation and practice of those truths. For example:--

1. The sermon on the Mount.

When we compare the ideals found in this sermon with what we see and practice, we note quite a contrast. Christ gave this message nineteen

centuries ago, and yet today the world is amazed when it sees a man actually trying to follow Christ. Behold the astonishment when someone makes a really serious attempt to carry out the spirit and teachings of Christ whole-heartedly. Arthur Nash declared his intention of conducting his business according to the golden rule, "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." When Nash announced his intention, people declared it was impossible for him to conduct his business in that manner, and after all he was only a religious fanatic.

2. His teaching that prejudice was a destructive force in the soul.

It is hard to get rid of prejudice against those who differ from us in race, color, religion, or customs. May do not try to take Christ seriously about prejudice and their minds become more influenced by unreasonable bias and their judgment becomes more warped with the passing of the years.

3. His teaching about forgiveness.

Grudges would disappear if people would take Him seriously when He said, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

4. His teaching about the secret of fictitious and satisfactory living.

The important thing in this regard is the matter of one's relationship to Christ and not to outward things. He said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth" and yet, the majority of people look to things as the way to abundant living.

II. Why do we not take Christ seriously?

1. Selfish living.

Many follow Christ outwardly; are a part of an institution which bears His name but they do not attempt to go all the way with Him. They do not attempt to go all the way with Him. They do not know what it is to surrender their wills to His will or to yield completely to His leadership. They seek Him for what they can secure from Him for themselves.

In the sixth chapter of John we read about the day following the feeding of the multitudes. The Master had crossed the sea of Galilee and was met by a great crowd. He knew the secret of their enthusiasm for Him that day, and He exposed their motives by saying, "Ye seek Me because ye ate of the loaves and were filled." They did not seek Christ, but His food. Thus, some seek membership in churches because they anticipate respectability from such membership. Many want God for selfish reasons only. They want security from the fears of this life, death, and from the life beyond. They think primarily of what they can get from religion. Christ showed the multitude not only what they would receive, but also some of the demands made upon all who follow Him. But as He pointed out the more stern side of discipleship, the great throng began to melt away, saying one to another, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" Then follows a sad statement about these people. "From that time many of His disciples want

back and walked no more with Him." There were thousands present to receive but barely a dozen when the giving of life in complete committal was demanded.

2. Shallow living.

We live too much on the surface of things. We become critical and superficial and fail to give adequate response to the great issues of life. Christ wanted the scribe with whom He was talking to know what was involved in his declaration, "I will follow thee whithersoever Thou goest." To paraphrase His words, here was what He was saying. "You have declared that you will follow Me wherever I go; do you understand what that means? I am an itinerant and homeless teacher. The foxes and birds have better dwelling places than I. To follow Me means inconvenience, hardship, sacrifice, persecution, and probably a cruel death. If you would come after Me, there must be no mental reservations, but unfaltering faith, for he that having put his hand to the plow and looketh back is not fit for the kingdom of Heaven." Have you ever realized what it means to take Christ seriously? Henry Ward Beecher said, "Religion means work. Religion means work in a dirty world. Religion means peril; blows given and blows taken as well. Religion means transformation. The world is to be cleaned by somebody; and you are not called of God if you are ashamed to scour and scrub".

Does fear of criticism keep you back from going all the way with Christ? Does timidity and cowardice stand between you and victory? Many have been stirred by the message of Christ, but their wills are not submissive to His will. They prefer a religion of song but not of sacrifice. A faith of comfort but not of a cross. Our shallow lives often lead to tragic inconsistencies. We demand the right to choose what shall be the elements of our faith. We accept or reject principles as they please or displease us. It is a very unwise and dangerous thing for one to go through the Bible and pick out what he will obey and skip over the remainder.

3. Substitutionary living.

It is amazing what people will do rather than make a serious attempt to obey Jesus Christ. Many substitute something else for what He has commanded.

Another outstanding example of substitutionary living is that of King Saul who tried to substitute a great ceremonial sacrifice in the place of obedience to God. Samuel said, "Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." No substitute has ever been devised which can be offered in the place of doing God's will in our lives. "And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say". Luke 6:46.

III. What happens when we take Christ seriously?

1. We shall have our temptations and troubles.
2. Probably we shall be misunderstood and ridiculed.
3. We shall find a new inspiration in living.
4. We shall find a new power in our soul.

5. We shall be able to serve our generation by the will of God.

An outstanding hope of this world is for men and women do take Christ seriously.