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WHAT DO YOU GET  
WHEN YOU FOLLOW CHRIST?

Luke 18:28-34

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Luke Lesson 85

## What do You Get When You Follow Christ? Luke 18:28-34

Have you ever asked yourself, "Is it really worth it to follow Christ?" Have you ever compared what you get with what those in the world get? You look around and see people devoting their lives to the pleasures of this world. Often they seem to be having a pretty good time. They live well. They have plenty of money. They take nice vacations. They drive new cars. They have all sorts of expensive toys. You look at them and think, "If I were not a Christian, I could have some of those things. I wouldn't have to give a large portion of my income to the Lord's work. I would have my weekends free to pursue whatever I wanted to do. Is it really worth it to follow Christ?"

If you've not asked that question, it may say something of your Christian commitment, namely, that you are not sacrificing much to follow Christ. I read recently that George Barna did a survey of 152 separate items comparing the lost world and the churches, and he said that there is virtually no difference between the two as to how we live.

Christ calls His followers to turn from sin and the pursuit of the things of this world. He said, "No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33). We cannot love the things of the world and God at the same time (1 John 2:15). These verses (and others like them) are not written as options for the super-committed. They are requirements for all who follow Christ. But even those of us who seek to follow Him fully will face times when we wonder, "Am I making a mistake to give up all this to follow Christ?"

Our text records a time when Peter was looking for some reassurance concerning his commitment to Christ. The disciples had just heard Jesus tell the rich young ruler to sell everything, give the money to the poor, and follow Him, and he would have treasures in heaven (18:22). After watching the man walk away sorrowful and hearing Jesus comment on how hard it is for the rich to be saved, Peter chimed in, "Behold, we [emphatic in Greek, meaning

*we* in contrast to *him*] have left our own homes, and followed You." Matthew 19:26 records that he also asked, "What then will there be for us?" He was wondering, "What do we get for following Christ? Is it really worth it to make the sacrifices we're making? Or, are we fools to give up everything to follow Christ?"

Our gracious Lord did not rebuke Peter. He knew that Peter needed some assurance. And, no doubt He knew that all of us who have given up the pursuit of worldly things to follow Him need frequent assurance. Just as the devil tempted Jesus with all the kingdoms of this world, so he repeatedly sets in front of us those who are enjoying this world's pleasures and says, "Follow me and you can have all this, too!" We need to be reminded that ...

To follow Christ, you must forsake all for Him, but you get blessings for time and eternity, along with trials in this life.

Jesus plainly lays out the cost of following Him, the blessings that follow, and the difficulties we will inevitably encounter in the process. First, the cost:

1. To follow Christ, you must forsake all for Him.

Peter's words, "Behold, we have left our own things [lit.] and followed You" refer back to Jesus' words to the rich young ruler (18:22), "Sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." The twelve had done what the young man refused to do. They had given up their jobs and even had left their families for a time in order to follow Christ.

This raises a thorny problem, namely, does Jesus require this literally for everyone? Must everyone give up all his possessions? Must everyone leave family to seek first God's kingdom? If so, there are few who follow Jesus. But if not, then what does He mean? If we say that Jesus' words only mean that we must be *willing* to forsake all, everyone thinks, "Whew, I'm willing, but I really don't have to do it!" And, we go on living just as we had before. But, clearly, there must be some drastic changes in how we live when we follow Jesus. So, what does it mean to forsake all to follow Christ? It means at least three things:

- A. Forsaking all to follow Christ means letting go of whatever known sin stands between me and God.

For the rich young ruler, his gold had become his god. It was his idol, and he had to let it go in order to trust in Christ for eternal life. The love of the things of this world is an idol for many who profess to know Christ. We like those things. We spend our lives collecting things. We accumulate so much stuff that we have to build bigger barns (we call them garages) to store it in. But in light of eternity, no earthly possession will really matter.

Others cling to other sins: sensuality, immorality, selfish quarrels, bitterness, anger, self-centeredness. Paul lists the deeds of the flesh and then warns, "Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21). We cannot cling to known sin and claim to be following Christ at the same time. He demands our exclusive commitment.

B. Forsaking all to follow Christ means committing myself to do whatever God wants me to do with my life.

It means giving God a blank check with my life and letting Him fill in the amount. It means enthroning Christ as the rightful Lord of everything I am and have. I first did this when I was in college, but I've had to renew the commitment at various points along the way. In college, I reasoned, "If God really loves me and knows what is best for me, then the only smart thing for me to do is to yield myself completely to Him and His will." I really didn't want to go to the jungles as a missionary, but I figured that if God wanted me to live in the jungles, I would be miserable living in the city. So I handed God the blank check.

When I got out of seminary and was seeking God's will, I wasn't so sure about being a pastor. But I couldn't shake off the verse, "I will build My church." I realized that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. So I said, "Okay, Lord, I'm willing to be a pastor if that's what You want for me."

The next thing I heard about was a church in Churubusco, Indiana that needed a pastor. If you love northeastern Indiana, please don't take offense, but it isn't high on my list of desirable places to live! But I told Marla, "If that's where God wants us, then we wouldn't be happy to be in California," where we wanted to be. So I told the church there to send me the information. It never came in the mail, and meanwhile, some opportunities in Cali-

fornia came along, including the church where I eventually served for 15 years. The Lord just wanted me to be willing to go wherever He wanted me. That has happened several other times since then.

Seeking first His kingdom means committing yourself to whatever God wants you to do with your life. Have you given Him the blank check? Remember, if you delight yourself in the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart (Ps. 37:4). Sometimes He grants your desires; at other times, He changes your desires to match His desires. But, you can trust the loving Father to do what is best when you give yourself fully to His cause.

Before I leave this point, I want to comment on forsaking family relationships to follow Christ. Some, such as missionary greats C. T. Studd and David Livingstone in the past century, and Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision in this century, have literally left their wives and children for the sake of the gospel. Pierce used to say that he had an agreement with God, that he would take care of God's helpless lambs overseas if God would take care of his back home. But, tragically, his oldest daughter committed suicide and his wife and other children had severe emotional problems stemming from his neglect. On the other side, some have refused to go to the mission field because of potential damage to their children. We have to ask, "Where is the biblical balance?"

Each person has to wrestle with this honestly before the Lord, and the answer may vary between families. For me, it would be wrong to take on the responsibilities of marriage and family and then take on a ministry that requires me to be gone from my family for large blocks of time. I question whether it is necessary to the success of God's kingdom to trot around the globe while my children are young. Many pastors in the U.S. are out every night "doing the Lord's work," but their children feel neglected and unloved because their dad is never home. But if I do not manage my own household well, which includes loving and training my children, then I am not qualified to be a church leader (1 Tim. 3:4).

If I were called to serve overseas, I would insist on my children living with me during their younger years, and not being sent off to mission boarding school. If my wife had to cut back on mission work to home school the children, so be it. God has given the task of rearing children to parents, not to mission boarding

schools. I think that to abandon our family responsibilities to serve the Lord is a tragic misapplication of Jesus' words here.

But we can go too far in the other direction, making an idol out of our families. If we push our children to succeed financially as the main thing in life or if we don't want them to go into missions because they will move far away from us, then we're being selfish and worldly. We emphasized missions with our children from the time that they were toddlers. We realized then that the result might be that someday they would move to another continent to serve Christ. We must be willing to be separated from our children and grandchildren for Christ's sake. That's the cost of forsaking all and committing myself to do what God wants with my life and of encouraging my children to do the same. But if we cling selfishly to our children, we will ultimately lose far more than if we release them into Christ's service.

C. Forsaking all to follow Christ means pursuing Christ and His cause.

Here I'm focusing on the positive, of what it means to *follow* Christ. To follow Christ means to walk daily in fellowship with the gracious Savior who loved me and gave Himself for me. It means to know the living God and to have the joy of using my life for His kingdom. In other words, focus on the joy of knowing Christ and serving Him, not on the so-called sacrifices that you must make.

When I got married, I gave up my independence. I also incurred a lot of bills that I never had when I was single. When we had kids, I lost even more of my free time and I got hit with even more bills! But I rarely ever think of those sacrifices. In fact, I wouldn't even call them sacrifices. I wouldn't dream of trading being married and having children for the freedom from bills and the free time it would gain me. Why not? Because I enjoy the relationships with my wife and children far above any so-called sacrifices that those relationships cost me.

That's how it should be with the Lord. Walk in daily fellowship with Him, and you hardly think of what you have given up. The pleasures of this world pale in comparison with the pleasure of knowing the Savior. The sacrifices of time, money, and hardship

that you encounter in serving Christ are nothing compared with the joy of knowing Him. That leads us to the blessings:

2. When you follow Christ, you get blessings for time and for eternity.

The motivation for following Christ should not be just to get the benefits. We follow Him because He is who He claimed to be, the Savior and Messiah. But He graciously reassures us by telling us of the promised benefits.

A. You get blessings in this life.

If you give up anything for Christ, He promises that you will receive many times (Mark 10:30 says 100 times) as much *at this time*. If I could offer you an investment that is *guaranteed* to make you 100 percent, you would jump at it! But Jesus offers you an investment that pays 10,000 percent in this life, backed by the bank of heaven! Everyone who forsakes all to follow Christ is grossly overpaid! How can you refuse such an offer?

If you give up your house to follow Jesus, He gives you hundreds of homes, all around the world. You may give up your family ties, but He puts you into His worldwide family, with brothers and sisters all over the globe. Next month, Marla and I are going to the Czech Republic to minister. A man whom we have never met has already emailed me and told me that he will meet us at the airport and that we can stay with him and his wife in Prague. We've got family in the Czech Republic, and I'm sure that we'll meet more family members once we're there!

When you give sacrificially to the Lord's work, He promises to add to your account all the things that the Gentiles seek (Matt. 6:33). Why don't we do it? Sometimes, it is because we're sloppy managers of God's resources. But often, we're afraid to give generously because we fear that God won't take care of us.

A pastor challenged a young man to start giving regularly and generously to the Lord's work. The young man hesitated, afraid that he couldn't pay his bills if he did. The pastor finally said, "Listen, could you give in the way I've described if I promised to make up the difference each month out of my pocket if you fell short?" The young man thought a moment and then said, "Yes, I guess I could do it if you'd promise to make up the difference."

The pastor replied, "How about that! You'd trust me, a poor pastor with not much in the bank, to meet your bills, but you can't trust the Lord who owns the universe to meet your bills if you obey Him by giving generously!" If we forsake everything and go all out for the Lord, He promises to meet our needs. Alexander Maclaren observed, "The present world yields its full riches only to the man who surrenders all to Jesus" (*Expositions of Holy Scripture* [Baker], 9:144). As Paul said, we have nothing, yet we possess all things (2 Cor. 6:10).

B. You get blessings in eternity.

Jesus says that in the age to come, we get eternal life. That is far more than living forever. It means living in the presence of God in His glory and with His angels and His saints, with no sin or suffering to mar the experience. I don't know exactly what heaven will be like, but I believe that God gives us the descriptions of golden streets and the jeweled city and the river of life running through it to say, "Trust Me, it's far better than you can ever imagine."

But there's the rub: *We have to trust Him!* We have to believe that His promises are true. We have to let go of treasures on earth and put all our eggs in the heaven basket. Jesus' promise to the rich young ruler is His promise to you: you will have treasure in heaven if you forsake all to follow Him. But, that's not all.

3. When you follow Christ, you get trials in this life.

In Mark's account, Jesus casually throws in persecutions in the same sentence with all of the blessings. But I'm deriving this point in Luke's account from Jesus' announcement of His death and the disciples' resulting confusion (18:31-34).

This is Jesus' sixth mention of His impending death in Luke (9:22; 9:44-45; 12:49-50; 13:32-33; 17:25; seventh if you count the veiled reference in 5:35; see also 2:35; 9:31). This is the first reference to the Gentiles' role in the crucifixion. Jesus specifically mentions how they will mock Him, mistreat Him, and spit upon Him. Then they will scourge and kill Him, but He will rise again on the third day. If they so despised and persecuted the Lord, we can expect similar treatment (John 15:20). Matthew Henry points out that we get into trouble because we read our Bibles by halves,

looking for the glories of Christ and the Christian life, but not for the sufferings. But we must expect hardship and suffering, because our Lord Himself went through the same and He warned us of what we will encounter. Paul says, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Not only would the disciples face the sorrow of watching Christ die and then face persecution themselves, they also wrestled with confusion in response to Jesus' announcement. They did not comprehend what He was saying. I'm sure that they understood the words, but they must have figured that He was speaking spiritually, not literally. From one perspective, it was hidden from them. God closed their minds so that they could not comprehend what Jesus was saying. Why would He do that? In His sovereign wisdom, He knows what we can handle and when we can handle it. As it turned out, the disciples' dullness regarding Christ's death and resurrection furnished additional proof of it to the church. As Alfred Plummer observes, "The theory that they believed, because they *expected* that He would rise again, is against all the evidence" (*The Gospel According to St. Luke* [Charles Scribner's Sons], p. 429).

From the disciples' side, the reason they could not comprehend Jesus' words was their own expectations. They so strongly expected that the Messiah would be a political Savior who would set up His earthly kingdom that they could not conceive of a suffering Savior. Often our own spiritual preconceptions prevent us from seeing the truth as revealed in God's Word. But the point is, when we follow Christ, we will go through times of confusion and disappointment, when things just don't seem to make sense. We will stake everything on one of God's promises, but then our plan seems to get crucified and we don't get it. That's when we have to go back to the basics and trust God even though we do not understand Him.

### Conclusion

If you've been tracking with me, you have figured out that although there are many blessings in this life when we forsake all to follow Jesus, the real payoff is in eternity. "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19). So how can we know *for sure* that the eternal rewards will

really be there and that they are worth the sacrifices of following Christ now?

Three ways: *First, you can trust the truthfulness of Jesus' promises because of His authority.* He says, "Truly I say to you" (18:29). When Jesus says anything, it's true; but when He says, "*Truly I say to you,*" you know for sure that it's true! Either you have to call Jesus deceived or a deceiver, or what He promised about the blessings for those who follow Him is true.

*Second, you can trust the truthfulness of Jesus' promises because of the prophetic Word.* Although evil men put Him to death and they are responsible for their great sin, they were only fulfilling "all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man" (18:31; see Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). God's Word predicted Jesus' death in detail centuries before it happened (see Psalm 22; Isaiah 53). Jesus' own predictions of His death were exactly fulfilled. The certainty of God's prophetic Word assures us that history will culminate exactly as He predicts and that heaven will be all that He has promised.

*Third, you can trust the truthfulness of Jesus' promises because of His resurrection.* He arose on the third day, just as He predicted He would. As a result, the confused and fearful disciples were transformed into confident, bold witnesses, willing to give their very lives for the gospel.

Darrell Bock (*Luke* [Baker], 2:1492) observes, "The passage asks readers to reflect on their choices. Do they rely on themselves and their possessions or do they trust God?" I would add, do we have one foot in the world, just in case, or are we willing to forsake everything to follow Jesus? When we do, we get both blessings and trials in this life, but we will have the joy of eternal life with Him in the age to come. You'll never regret forsaking everything else to follow Jesus!

## Discussion Questions

1. Is it a cop out to say, "We don't literally have to forsake all to follow Christ"?
2. Is forsaking all just for the super-committed or is it the requirement for every believer?
3. How can we extricate ourselves from the materialism that surrounds us? How can we know when we give enough?
4. Where is the balance between family versus ministry? To which extreme are American Christians most prone?

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