

## The Cost of Taking a Free Gift

<sup>25</sup>Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: <sup>26</sup>"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup>And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. – Luke 14:25-27

Through the years, numerous men had appeared on Israel's stage of such charisma that the national question had to be raised: "Is this the *Messiah*?" Typically, such individuals were fiercely anti-Roman, which was what the Jews expected from their *Messiah*, but Jesus was different. He was neither militant nor aggressive and He barely paid any attention at all to the Romans. Still, He did wield undeniable power. This potential *Messiah* healed the sick, drove out demons, fed crowds with hardly any food at all and even raised the dead on occasion.

Little imagination is required to grasp why crowds were drawn to Jesus, but it was almost as if the volume of the crowds disturbed Him. He spoke in words that would have the effect of thinning-out this multitude. He told them that His disciples must "hate" their nearest and dearest as well as themselves. Now, it helps to understand that biblical love and hatred are not as riveted to passion as are our ideas of love and hatred. Biblical love is as much about taking action to better another as it is about how we feel, so "hatred" in this sense is not malevolence so much as indifference.

Christ's challenge was a simple one, "I come first in all things. You must love me to the point of being indifferent to all others." Of course, we now understand that to love Christ means that we can never be indifferent to anyone, but uncompromised loyalty to Jesus is a prerequisite to understanding how to truly love others in His Name.

Jesus also told would-be followers that they must "bear crosses" in order to be true disciples. Not one Jew in that crowd understood "a cross" to refer to one of life's frustrations. No one equated a cross with rearing an afflicted child, tolerating an abusive boss or enduring crabby in-laws. Every Jew knew that "bearing a cross" was something a condemned man did. He carried the instrument of his own capital punishment to the site of execution. Cross-bearing was a death metaphor.

Jesus wanted people to think carefully before they jumped on His bandwagon for the gift He freely offered. He wanted them to know that tagging along just for the excitement of the moment or because of the miracles would not make them true disciples. They would have to embrace His values and shoulder His mission. They would have to upend their earthly ideas about kingdoms and power and riches. They would have to endure the scorn and ridicule of the world.

Partial commitment to Jesus was tantamount to no commitment at all. It would be costly to be His disciple. Religious folks would ridicule and eventually resent Him and His own. Those with their noses to the grindstone, who were not particularly religious but who never thought of life beyond the present moment, would think Him and His followers a bit odd. But to those who found Jesus to be "a pearl of great price" worth any sacrifice, life would never be the same again.

Jesus freely offers salvation and the assurance that our sins have been removed from God's sight. The opportunity to begin again is God's free gift of grace, but, paradoxically, living as the redeemed of God is costly. There remains no sanctuary for old sins and vile passions. Selfish ambitions have to be surrendered. One must love the things Jesus loves and despise the things Jesus despises. It is not as though Jesus is tacking some great cost onto something marketed as free. New life is a gift. But, a man can only live one life at a time, so he must die to the one if he is to embrace the other.