

Sticker Shock!

My wife and I have a very unique ability. Maybe you share this ability too. In our family this ability has turned into somewhat of a humorous game. When we are out window shopping, we pick items - furniture, kitchen gadgets, and other household items - intent on identifying the most costly item in the store or showroom without first looking at the price tag. Almost without fail we are able to recognize the most costly items on the first try. Apparently we have expensive tastes without expensive means.

Oddly, the opposite is often true in the lives of many Christians. When it comes to identifying the cost of following Jesus, they usually consider it “cheap” - a call with little weight and no cost to the follower. Maybe, since salvation is a gift that is solely received by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9), they presume that following requires no work nor effort. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Jesus is brutally honest about the cost of following Him. In Luke 14:25-35, enormously large crowds have gathered around Jesus as a part of His final zig-zag journey toward Jerusalem. The multitude is comprised of amused spectators, ardent seekers, and genuine followers. In light of this motley crew, Jesus outlines His demands for those who desire to be His disciples. And the expectations He has of His followers are far from pedestrian. Don't get sticker shock, for the cost is high!

To put Jesus' expectations into their proper perspective, it may be helpful to understand the significance of the teacher and student relationship in Jesus' day. Well known authority on Jewish culture, Ray Vander Laan, explains the discipleship dynamic and demand in the following way:

The Hebrew word for disciple is *talmid*. This word stresses the relationship between rabbi (teacher or master) and disciple (student). **A *talmid* of Jesus' day would give up his entire life in order to be with his teacher.** The disciple didn't only seek to know what the teacher knew, as is usually the case today. It was not enough just to know what the rabbi said, but **the foremost goal of any *talmid* was to become like the rabbi and do what the rabbi did.**

In Jesus' teaching it is very clear that following the Savior is a very personal endeavor. Three times in Luke's account Jesus couples the demands of following Him with the phrase “**my** disciple” (Lk 14:26, 27, 33). For example, Jesus says, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be *my disciple*” (v. 27, emphasis added). It is a relationship that requires the disciple to walk and talk,

as well as listen and obey. It involves surrendering one's own plans and ambitions. It is shaped by a disciple's slow, daily death to self. Following Jesus is not a willy-nilly decision that a so-called Christian adds to his or her life like they would a new outfit or a gym membership. On the contrary. It is a resolution that requires followers to love Jesus more than all others (Lk 14:26), to fully affirm the shame and suffering of Christ as their own (Lk 14:27), and to conclude that their shortcomings demand constant reliance on the resources their Lord provides (Lk 14:28-32).

It is completely reasonable, then, to expect a transformation to take place that causes the disciple to become like the teacher in character and action. To make it personal, the call to discipleship will have powerful results on you and your surroundings. Jesus summarizes the discipleship impact in the final verses of the chapter (Lk 14:33-35). According to Jesus, His followers find it completely reasonable to experience a mutual "goodbye" between them and the world in which they live (v. 33). As they follow Jesus, they discover that the world no longer has a hold on or sway over them. Earthly possessions, worldly wisdom, and superficial piety diminish in value, while becoming like Jesus increases in worth. In addition, disciples make an impact on their surroundings. Their presence is compelling to the world in which they live. Like salt, their very presence stems the spread of sin and adds zest to life by demonstrating the character of God (Gal 5:22-24).

True disciples recognize the high cost of following Jesus. They are not surprised by Jesus' demands, because they continue to be amazed by His inexpressible gift. They remain faithful to their call. The truth is, the only way salt can lose its taste is by being diluted. So, stay salty and follow Jesus only!

John 6:55-58 (ESV) - *"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so **whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.** This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*