

Is being a Disciple of Jesus really worth it??? *Well, that's a bit like asking a farmer, "Is 'working on the land' worth the isolation?" ...*

You see, some folk might miss being close to:

- *the shops;*
- *a major airport;*
- *some people might care about how far they are from "good coffee" (I personally don't get that);*
- *family;*
- *medical specialists;*

But so what???? A true farmer wouldn't be anything else... – how could they be? – They feel they're born to live and work on the land...

So, is being a follower of Jesus really worth it? What a silly question. Of course it is....

But be in no doubt – Being a Disciple of Jesus comes with a cost, and it's a significant cost... But this is what **we** have been born to **be** – It's what we've been called to be...

And it all hinges on the fact of "Who Jesus is".

Jesus has just asked His Disciples, who they reckon He is, and Peter gave the answer, "You're the Christ of God".

Yes Peter, You're spot on!!!!

But remember last week, we talked about how the Kingdom of God turns everything on its head... You'd think if Jesus is the Christ – if Jesus is the anointed Chosen One of God, then "Yayyy! Good times for Jesus!".....

But our Lord Jesus Christ came as the suffering servant. And for God's plan to be fulfilled, it was entirely necessary for Jesus to suffer and be rejected. And he was **absolutely** rejected by those who were supposed to be closest to God.

And it was necessary for Jesus to be killed and to be raised back to life again on the third day... That was the cost of our forgiveness and the cost of our reconciliation with God – Jesus being nailed to the cross...

It was **after** His death, in His resurrection, and at His 2nd coming, **that's** where Jesus is glorified!!!!

So, that was last week.

Today we move on to Jesus' disciples? The fact that Jesus suffered and died, that makes available for us, a wonderful, free gift of:

- forgiveness of sins;
- salvation; and
- eternal life in glory with Christ Jesus...

Beauty! Good times for Jesus' disciples... Right????

Well y e s, ,, – from an eternal perspective, “Yes, Good times for Jesus' disciples.”, but...

Jesus said, (and He said it to all) – (I think that's Luke's way of saying, “This isn't just for “the special apostles – Jesus is saying this to everyone who would follow Him (This is for

you and I too): "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

There is a **cost** to being a Disciple of Jesus. Yes, Jesus paid the price for our salvation, and as such, it is a free gift. But living **as** the saved people of God means following after Christ, and what is that? The way of Christ, is the way of the Suffering Servant.

Being a Disciple of Jesus, is a life of self-denial. Any gospel that is preached today, that doesn't include "denial of self", isn't the Gospel.

- Self-centredness;
- Self-gratification;
- Self-preservation;
- Self-achieving;
- Self-betterment....

– For a Disciple of Jesus, all of this self-improvement type preaching – "Becoming the best "self" you can be", is a nonsense... The way of Christ is a **denial** of self.

And it's a denial of self, to the extreme – we take up our cross daily to follow Jesus.

Now for us, we see the cross as something glorious. Jesus is our only experience we know of "the cross". But these first Disciples of Jesus knew very well what the cross represented. Executions were common. It is **highly** likely, that every one of the Disciples had (at some time) seen a man, led by a small group of soldiers, carrying a cross out of town. And they

knew what that meant. To carry a cross was a very public thing, and it was a thing of shame.

A person carrying a cross:

- was an object of ridicule and scorn;
- was someone whom the world had condemned – we don't want your kind around here;
- was someone who had no future in this world;
- their life was forfeit....

And Jesus said, if you want to follow me, then that's you...

I sometimes think, "Jesus wasn't a very good salesman"... Many evangelists today, as they proclaim the Gospel, they focus on the good things:

- forgiveness;
- eternal life;
- your status as a child of God;
- "who you are in Christ";
- "God has a wonderful plan and purpose for your life"...

– All designed to appeal to one's sense of "being needed", and telling them how wonderful their life is going to be from now on....

That's what a salesman does... – They talk up their product, and don't talk about the cost.

And that's not the sort of preacher Jesus was. Jesus was up-front, right from the start. If you want to become a follower of Mine, you need to know the cost, right up-front:

- Your life is forfeit;
- You no longer live for this world;

- In fact, in the eyes of others, being a Disciples of Jesus is a thing of ridicule and scorn...
- You will lose out – miss out on many things;
- You give up all your worldly hopes and dreams;
- You may even lose your physical life....

Still interested???

And let's not play-this-down... Losing one's life for the sake of being a Disciple of Jesus is not rare. The first martyr was Stephen. And there are people who this very day, will die because they are followers of Jesus, and the world hates them.

You see, the Kingdom of God turns everything on its head. And you need to know this, otherwise you're not going to understand why the cost is worth it. As a Disciple of Jesus, for you, the Kingdom of God turns everything on its head.

Jesus said: ²⁴ **For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.**

The earthly perspective is, "There's nothing more valuable than your life...", but what is a life worth?

*Well, believe it or not, I can give you an answer for that. In Australia, the value of a life is \$5.3M. **Or** to extend a person's life by a year, that's worth \$220 000.*

Seriously.... The Government have determined something called "Value of Statistical Life" (VSL). It's so they can do all kinds of cost/benefit analyses. So, when they are assessing

a particular project, they can work out if that project is worth doing.

e.g.: if a particular road project is expected to save 10 lives over the next 5 years, they can put a \$ value on that. So, what is a life worth??? Apparently it's \$5.3Mⁱ.

Of course, in some countries the VSL is non-existent – a life might only be statistically worth a few cents. But in our culture, life is everything – “life” (we believe) must be protected at all costs...

Our governments are getting really concerned with the rising cost of health-care for our aging population. We are throwing bucket-loads of money at health-care to keep our aging population alive for as long as possible...

And we Australians are generally hooked on the age-old quest for “a long life”. And as always, anti-aging treatments and therapies sales-people (along with snake-oil salesmen) are “making a killing” (Pardon the pun), selling their goods to people hoping they can extend their lives a bit....

And sadly, many **Christians** fall for the same trap: That having a long life, is the most important thing...” ... **No it's not.** The Kingdom of God turns all that on its head. As Christians, we hold very loosely to this life. We're only passing through this life anyway... And for many, simply **being** a follower of Jesus, is dangerous.

And so, the earthly perspective is, “There’s nothing more valuable than your life...” But the Kingdom of God turns all that on its head, because that’s the one thing Jesus is telling us to give up. “Deny yourself”. It’s not about us. It’s about Him. And “Take up your cross”, because we don’t dwell on this life – we focus on eternal life.

If my life is more important to me than Christ Jesus, that means, that’s a pretty good indicator, “He isn’t my Lord”... And if Jesus isn’t my Lord, am I even saved? No.

This is what Jesus meant when He said: **whoever would save his life will lose it**. If this physical life is more important to me than Jesus, then eternal life isn’t on my agenda...

But that doesn’t mean we take up new dangerous hobbies like BASE jumping; and motorbike racing; and Russian Roulette, ,, all with the aim of ending our lives sooner. It’s about following Jesus and proclaiming the Gospel, even if it’s a dangerous thing to do, and even if we’re despised for doing it.

It’s about standing strong in our faith (no matter what)...

Let’s move on:

V²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

I’m going to keep saying this: The Kingdom of God perspective is so different, to what’s considered “normal”...

It's not uncommon for a person, as they near the end of their lives, to re-evaluate everything, **and** they'll often have regrets.

- I wish I spent less time at work, and more time with my family;
- I wish I spent less time making money, and more time enjoying what I had;
- I wish I'd taken more time to just have fun...

It's a revaluation of their life-choices (with hindsight)...

And we think "Oh yeah, wise words:

- Less working;
- more family time;
- more fun time;
- more special treats

– that's the way to make life so much better..."

But in many cases, their change of priorities, is still the world's way. At their later stage of life, they simply find satisfaction in different things. But it's still all about self...

If a person structures their life for "gain", whether it be about:

- financial gain; or
- physical gain; or
- relational gain; or whether it's about
- more experiences;
- increasing fame; or
- getting respect or recognition....; or simply
- a gain in general satisfaction,

If a person structures their life for "gain" for self,, what profit is there in that? If you're not living your life for Jesus, you can gain **everything** you set your heart on – everything except the one thing that's truly important.

Such a person may lose or forfeit **himself**. And in the Greek, behind those two words (lose & forfeit), one is about destruction (one may lose himself {like you lose a house in a fire}), and the other is about having something, which decreases in value to become “worthless”.

The Kingdom of God turns everything on its head. You might live what you think is your best life (and achieved it),,, but in doing so, lose eternal life; **or** your heavenly reward is so decreased in value, it’s worthless...

Something I’m reminded of (over and over again), is that obediently following Jesus, will always involve “denying self”. The Lord may be calling **you** to step out and serve Him, or to make some major changes to your life that you never thought you could... What are you going to do? Well the choice is easy. You give up everything to follow Him...

But you might say to me, “But Michael, I’ve got so much to lose....” But Jesus sums up the Discipleship dilemma so simply – “Do you want to gain the whole world??? At what cost???”

You might say, “I don’t want the whole world – I just want this.” Same answer “If the whole world isn’t worth the cost, how insignificant is what you want to hold on to (given the cost)?”

And Jesus then goes on to speak in terms of being ashamed of Him and His words... If we're ashamed of Jesus, He'll be ashamed of us when He comes in His glory...

I find it hard to believe that in our culture, things have changed as much as they have in my short life. And at the risk of sounding like an old person (I guess I am): In this day and age of social media, we have become a society who feel good about themselves, when they can sling shame upon others. And some of the most vocal, are those who publicly shame Christians...

“Those Christians – horrible people – look what they believe – So judgmental..”

And in this current world, many Christians **are** ashamed. They don't even want anyone to know that they are a Christian... And churches and preachers are backing away from what the Bible teaches (because people don't like it), and even the teachings of Christ, because the world hate it, and they want to be liked by people (inclusive) – they want to be popular in the world... They don't want to be at the end of a multi-media public shaming campaign...

And many Christians who **do** proclaim the word of God, are publicly shamed.

You know what? That shouldn't be a surprise. Although the world admires their version of Jesus, they don't like the real Jesus at all. They don't like Jesus the Christ and they don't like His Gospel. And they never have. They crucified the real Jesus, and so they'll hate us too.

Don't be ashamed of Jesus. Even if the world shames us, don't be ashamed of Jesus. If we don't hold firm to our faith, and proclaim His name to this world, He will be ashamed of us, and that doesn't sound good to me.

You see, in the Kingdom of God, we look forward to Glory – when the Jesus (the Son of Man) **comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**

And some of those disciples, got to see a hint of the glory of the Kingdom of God. Some of them got to see a hint of it, 8 days after He said this, when Moses and Elijah appeared before them, and Jesus was transfigured and they saw His glory...

They got to see another hint of the Kingdom of God and the glory of Jesus when He was raised from the dead.

But they were just little tasters – they were a little hint of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God and the coming glory of Jesus...

And that's what we wait for...

With our eyes fixed on Him and on His glory, that's how (with joy), we take up our cross (every day), to follow Jesus, no matter what the danger – no matter what the ridicule,, Denying self, and not holding back – not hiding this faith we hold,, And praying, "Come Lord Jesus."

Amen.

ⁱ <https://oia.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/value-statistical-life-guidance-note.pdf>