

The Cost of Discipleship

Christians in the Western world have it rather easy. What we do really know about the cost of discipleship? We have freedom of worship, which we don't value highly enough. We have a very relaxed interest in religion but intense interests elsewhere. We can debate at length the latest sport spectacles but cannot get too excited about the miracle of God coming to man in Jesus Christ the Lord. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? When you meditate about this question for awhile, you become rather uncomfortable. You read Scripture and compare the life and the teaching of Jesus Christ with your own you peruse church history and you begin to wonder.

Yes, what do we, as Western Christians, still know about the cost of following Jesus? Jesus has many who love the kingdom but few who take His cross. He has many who want His comfort and consolation in times of grief, but few who are prepared to take up the cross when adversity comes. So easily we speak about the rest and the promise of heaven, but we are so reluctant to consider the truth that the way to heaven is narrow and well defined. Many want to drink the cup of joy, but few the cup of suffering.

Who is a disciple? He is a man of one master, and a Christian disciple is the man of the one Christ. The Master the Christian professes to follow is a Person with wounds in His hands and in His feet. The Christ of the Gospels has no similarity to the One painted on Christmas cards or to the One portrayed in romantic literature. He is not One who gives dividends for faithful service. When Jesus calls a man, He says "Come and die." These are hard words, but they do point to the heart of Christ's teachings about the cost of discipleship. Yet throughout history there have been, men and women who heard those words of the Lord; and when faced with the choice of denying Christ and live or confessing Christ and die, they choose death, When Origen, a third century Christian, at the age of seventeen, heard that his father was to be martyred, he wanted to die with him, and had not his mother, in the night, taken away his clothes, he would have indeed suffered the same fate. When Origen was sixty-four, he was seized and tormented, but never recanted his faith. Untold thousands have sacrificed themselves, not out of pride or self will, but for the love of God. Their faith in the Christ of the Scriptures enabled them to give up their lands, their goods and even their own lives. They wanted to be faithful to their Lord and have a clean conscience. The blood of the martyrs has been and still is the seed of the church. This century also has its people who know the cost of discipleship. The blood of the martyrs still flows behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains. Christians are still being persecuted for their faith. The memory of the massacre of the five missionaries by the Auca Indians still lingers. Shall we not become bold for Jesus' sake even at the risk of having to suffer the martyr's death?

St. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote of the Christian church in the fourth century, which was granted freedom by Constantine the Great: "We have lost the greatness and the strength we had during our persecution and troubles." John Foxe, the author of the famous "*History of the Christian Martyrs*" wrote: "The history of Christian martyrdom is, in fact, the history of Christianity itself; for it is in the arena, at the stake, and in the

dungeon that the religion of Christ has won its most glorious triumphs." Let us learn from these martyrs to carry our own cross and that with joy!

Johan D. Tangleder
August, 1972