

The Cost of Discipleship

Mark 8:27-38

Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was known as the Lutheran pastor who was executed by the Nazis for treason during WWII, for his part in a failed attempt to assassinate Hitler. But he was also one of the sharpest, most insightful theologians of the 20th Century, and my personal favorite—even before I became a Lutheran. As a Lutheran, I was told he was a “peculiar” Lutheran. Why? Because, while we all talk a lot about grace, Bonhoeffer goes on to differentiate between cheap grace, which is not really grace, and costly, saving grace. In short, he makes us uncomfortable. In preparation for this sermon on Jesus’ words in **verse 34**, “*if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*”, I was driven back to Bonhoeffer’s book from which I borrowed the title for the sermon, ***The Cost of Discipleship***. As Lutherans, we don’t think that much about discipleship. Every hymnal I have collected over the years has a listing titled “Discipleship” or “Commitment” in the Topical index, except the **LSB**. Today, we look at what is so costly about discipleship.

Deny Himself

What does Jesus mean when He says that if a person wants to come after Him, he must *deny himself*? To deny yourself means to give up something. If you deny yourself food, you will starve to death.

Cheap Grace

We are justified by grace alone. This is true. However, when we think of this only as a doctrine, it causes us to think that since what we do doesn’t matter for our salvation, what we do doesn’t matter at all. We must be sure we don’t slip into a works-based theology of salvation. This degenerates into thinking that our sins are justified. That means we can live like the world and be saved, because all our sins are covered by grace. It looks like this. We come into worship and have Confession and Absolution, so we can enter the presence of God. We worship, sing, pray, and hear the Word. We receive the body and blood of our Lord, our sins are forgiven, and our faith is strengthened. We go out into the world and sin. Then the process starts all over. This happens week after week, month after month, with no change. Where’s the Christian growth? We get stuck in a revolving-door faith. We should not confuse a desire to give up sinning with salvation by works.

Costly Grace

Costly grace keeps the focus on the person. It is the person who is justified by grace, not the sins. God doesn’t take away our fallen nature, it is true. But he does plant a desire in our hearts to turn away from that sin (Read **Romans 7:21-23**). This is the struggle we talked about last week, the struggle grace brings us into. This is what it means to be penitent. This is what it means to be justified. We deny ourselves by denying ourselves the right to sin, to do as we please. The sin of Adam and Eve was that they did not deny themselves.

Take Up His Cross

What does it mean to *take up your cross*? A cross is not an item of jewelry, but an instrument of death.

Cheap Grace

Cheap grace doesn't worry about taking up your cross, because cheap grace is grace without discipline, grace without a cross. Cheap grace is a commodity the church doles out freely to everyone who wants it. Cheap grace sees salvation as a free ticket to heaven. Cheap grace focusses on what I can get out of it. I am told many people voted for our current President because he promised free college tuition to anyone whose family income is below \$125,000. It's free, therefore it's an act of grace. But everything has a price tag. Somewhere along the line, someone must pay the expenses that a college tuition entails.

Costly Grace

Costly grace is rooted in the cross and the Christ of the cross; that is the price tag of grace. Sin is a terrible affront to God and must be paid for. If you and I can't pay for our sins, who can? The only One who can pay the price is the Son of God. It cost Him His life. He had to die one of the most horrible deaths imaginable. Grace is not a common commodity. It's a PEARL OF GREAT PRICE (**Matthew 13:45-46**), a TREASURE HIDDEN IN A FIELD (**Matthew 13:44**). It's precious and valuable, priceless even. We must treat it as such.

Follow Me

What does it mean to *follow Jesus*? To follow Jesus is to obey Him.

Cheap Grace

Cheap grace doesn't worry about following Jesus. It's an "easy believeism." There is no demand to obey with cheap grace. "As a Christian, I can do my own thing. I can go to church when I want, give what I want, and live how I want. All I must do is believe." The problem is that this kind of thinking dulls the conscience. Given enough time, one can no longer hear the Word of God.

Costly Grace

Bonhoeffer said this in his book: *Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes*. Does that mean that obedience produces faith? No, but you can't believe without obeying. Until his faith failed him, Peter could walk on water. But he didn't have the faith to do that until he stepped out of the boat (**Matthew 14:28-30**). If you're having trouble believing, step out of the boat and follow Jesus in obedience.

The Cost

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP is two lives—the life of Christ, which paid the price of our sins, so we can be disciples and the life of the believer, as he denies himself, takes up his cross, and follows Jesus. Grace is free, but it's not cheap. It's costly and precious.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
