



The Cost of Discipleship

by JENNIFER KENNEDY DEAN

TERI HORTON BOUGHT AN ABSTRACT PAINTING from a junk store in California for \$5.00. Ten years later, she discovered that the “junk” she purchased was likely an original Jackson Pollock painting and could be worth more than \$10 million. Let’s project our imaginations into the future and suppose that Ms. Horton has been paid \$10 million for the painting that cost her \$5.00. Let’s imagine that she is sitting in the palatial mansion the money has afforded her and that she is dripping in jewels and draped in fine designer clothing, none of which she could have afforded previously. Imagine that I ask her, “What did that Jackson Pollock painting cost you?” How do you think she would answer that question? I think she would say, “Cost me? It cost me nothing. It gained me \$10 million and afforded me everything I own.” When the profit far outweighs the investment, we call it gain. The initial cost is swallowed up in the benefit it obtains, and it shows up on the “profit” side of the balance sheet.

Jesus challenged those who would be His disciples first to count the cost. “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish’” (Luke 14:28-30). He made it clear that to be His disciple would cost a person everything. But Jesus also challenged those who sought to be His disciples to count the reward. After you count the cost, then count the reward. “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). When the benefit far outweighs the cost, we call it gain.





“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Phil. 3:7-10).

Do you see what Paul is saying? He said that he gave up everything he valued because when he compared it to “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,” everything he valued was rubbish. It was nothing. It was less than nothing. The worth of everything he valued was swallowed up in the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. If we could ask Paul, “What did radical discipleship cost you?” I think Paul would answer, “Cost me? It cost me nothing and gained me everything.”

The Call to Discipleship

Jesus’ invitation to discipleship was framed in these words: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

In the gospels, we see that Jesus often was referred to as “Rabbi.” Let me give you some insight into that title. A rabbi was scholar. He was a learned expositor of the Scriptures. The only job of a rabbi was to study, to learn and to teach. There were different schools of rabbinical thought and these schools, or ways of approaching interpretation of the *Torah* and the *Talmud*, were called “yokes.” To become a disciple of one rabbi or another was to take that particular rabbi’s yoke upon your neck. Notice how Peter uses the word “yoke” in Acts 15:10 and how Paul uses it in Galatians 5:1. In each case they are referring to a branch of teaching or biblical interpretation. It was a term commonly employed in this way. When Jesus’ contemporaries heard Him





invite them to take His yoke upon them, there was no confusion about what He meant.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn *from Me*,” He said. You see, a disciple did not learn *about* his rabbi. Rather he learned *from* his rabbi. A disciple was not a casual learner, but rather he was one who left everything else in order to follow his rabbi day and night. He gained far more than knowledge from his rabbi. He absorbed his rabbi’s life. A disciple learned from his rabbi a way of thinking and living. He listened to his rabbi; he discussed and debated with his rabbi; he ate as his rabbi ate; he slept as his rabbi slept; he used his rabbi’s phrases and speech patterns. As much as was possible, the rabbi reproduced himself in the disciple.

A disciple became the pupil of a rabbi as a young teen-ager and lived as a disciple until the age of 30, at which time that disciple became a rabbi. When that disciple-turned-rabbi taught, he was teaching the words and the heart and the life of his rabbi. He might say, “The words I speak are not my words, they are the words of my rabbi.” But that rabbi’s rabbi had a rabbi. And that rabbi’s rabbi’s rabbi had a rabbi. No rabbi spoke on his own authority. A rabbi might say to his disciples, “Everything my rabbi has taught me, I am making known to you.”

Are you recognizing that Jesus was and is an altogether different kind of Rabbi, and so being His disciple—taking His yoke upon you—is a call like no other? When Jesus taught and healed, the religious leaders challenged Him by asking Him by what authority He did such things. “Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you this authority?’” (Matt. 21:23). They were asking Him, “Who is Your rabbi? Whose yoke do you wear?” The aspect of Jesus’ teaching and personality that first caught the crowds’ attention was that He taught as one who had authority. “The crowds were amazed at his teaching,





because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Matt. 7:28-29).

Many times, such as in the encounter recorded in Matthew 21:23-27, when the scholars and leaders of the day challenged Him by questioning His credentials, He used the typical rabbinical method for answering a question. He responded with a question of His own. The only reasonable and logical answer to His question would have led His detractors to the conclusion that Jesus’ authority came from His rabbi—Yahweh. Other times Jesus spoke more forthrightly claiming that His teaching came from Yahweh. “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me” (John 8:28). “These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me” (John 14:24). “When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me” (John 12:44-45).

His audience would have understood the meaning of His words: “My rabbi is Yaweh, and Yaweh is my Father.” He said to His disciples, “Everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).

An earthly rabbi did all he could to recreate his disciples into his own image, but it was an impossible task. After a prominent rabbi would die, having left behind disciples and writings to proclaim his thoughts, arguments would break out based on a new question and his disciples would debate among themselves, “What would Rabbi So-and-So have said? How would he have answered? What would he have done?” Whole new schools would emerge from these debates, with one disciple guessing this and another disciple supposing that. No one knew for sure, because the rabbi was no longer alive.

Your Rabbi, dear disciple, is able to do what an earthly rabbi could not. He lives *in you*. He is not dead. He is alive and He is alive in you. You do not have to ask “What would Jesus do if He were here?” Your Rabbi is here. He is





pouring His life into you, through you, from you. Your Rabbi is continually recreating you into His image from the inside out. He is changing you into His likeness from one degree of glory to the next.

The Cost of Discipleship

His call to you is that you give up everything you have to be His disciple. And when you have emptied yourself of everything you have, He will fill you with everything He has. What does your Rabbi have to give you? Hear the words of your Rabbi: “All that belongs to the Father is mine” (John 16:15). Once you have counted the cost, then count the reward.

The call is radical. Since the age of 20 I have passionately pursued a present-tense relationship with the living and indwelling Jesus. I have one goal for every moment that I live: to be completely and utterly abandoned to Him. I don't know where that will lead me, but wherever it leads me, that is where I'm going. People often ask me, “What is your five-year plan?” My answer: “To be completely and utterly abandoned to Him.” Long ago I learned that following the Ruler instead of the rules would take me down paths I could not have imagined. Every day I traverse new terrain, desperately dependent upon the moment-by-moment guidance of Jesus because He is leading me into new territory. He reminds me that my eyes must be fastened on Him, “then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before” (Josh. 3:4).

An earthly rabbi taught the Word of God. He interpreted it and explained it and applied it and tried his best to make it come alive for his disciples. Your Rabbi is the Word of God. Rabbi Jesus is teaching you Jesus.

By the time a young man could present himself to a rabbi as a possible disciple, that young man had been through the Jewish educational system in which he had memorized, word for word, the entire Scripture from Genesis through Malachi. Every word. Backward and forward. Knew it inside out.





Individuals did not own personal copies of the sacred Scriptures, but they devoted their lives to hiding the Word in their hearts. Rabbi Jesus is every word. Paul writes, quoting from the Old Testament, “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart” (Rom. 10:8).

My friend, to be a disciple of Rabbi Jesus, is there anything that you would not lay aside? Is there anything that holds its value when compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Him? When you hear Him call you be His *talmid*—His disciple, His follower, His learner—is there anything your flesh has to offer that can outweigh the riches of His kingdom?

Count the cost, and then count the reward. The cost of discipleship? It costs you nothing, and it gains you everything.



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