

IFL240121 sermon distribution

Title: the cost of following Jesus (1Cor 7:29-31)

Last week we talked about “why some people refuse to follow Jesus.” The answer was that, without a relationship with Jesus, they are blind to his ways. Today we will find that there is a cost to following Jesus. For those who do not know Christ, that cost is too much to bear. But for those who know Christ, it is overwhelmingly worth it.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ,

In our Gospel lesson from Mark Simon Peter and his brother Andrew are called by Jesus to “follow him.” His commandment “to follow him” was more than a commandment to travel together with him. It is an invitation to a living relationship with God through Jesus, an invitation to enter into a spiritual journey which would take them into eternal life. That same call has been given to us. Jesus has given that invitation to each and every one of us to “follow him”. It is an invitation into a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and an invitation to enter into a spiritual journey which will take us into eternal life. The journey to follow Christ is one of obedience to God. It is a journey of joy and a journey of sacrifice.

Those who seek to travel with Christ are many times called to suffer. Those who travel with Christ, many times are persecuted. This was true not only for the disciples, but is true for us as well. Take the political world, for example. Those who seek to be obedient to God are considered to be “intolerant” in this world, today. In our desire to follow Jesus, we believe there is good and evil. We recognize that there are behaviors and practices which are good, and there are some which are sinful. This worldview is considered to be an intolerant one by the world. and this world hates intolerant people. For the world of today, the word “love” has somehow become equated with “tolerance.” To be “intolerant” is to be “unloving.” That’s how the world looks at us. As it turns out, “intolerant” and “unloving” are two different concepts For example, because I love my children I become totally intolerant of them sticking their fingers in the electric wall sockets, Because I love my children, I become totally intolerant of them playing with knives, etc., etc. In fact, using these two examples, I can make the equal argument that “tolerance” means “uncaring”. In truth, they are two different concepts.

One of the problems is that the word “Tolerance” has changed over time. It is a reflection of changes which have happened in our society. “Tolerance” used to mean “to put up with undesirable behavior” Because of our love for them, we tolerated annoying people. In fact, in engineering “Tolerance” is the measure of allowable imperfection or error. (Random house) Decades ago, the dictionary defined the word “Tolerance” as “fair and objective attitude toward opinions and practices unlike our own.” (Random House). However, now the Internet dictionary (yahoo) defines Tolerance as “The capacity for recognizing and respecting the beliefs or practices of others.” Can you see the change? The word Tolerance has moved away from “putting up with undesirable behavior” to “acceptance of all beliefs and practices of others.” The new definition of tolerance says that “it is good,” to accept all beliefs and practices. Why? Because they are all good.

This concept became popular in the mid-20th century as an outgrowth of modern cultural anthropology. It is called cultural relativism. All cultures are good, insofar as they are all adaptations to their local environment. So, the idea that all beliefs are equally good comes from cultural anthropology. But when it comes to ethics, when it comes to the recognition of good and evil, relativism is not okay. Ethical relativism says “good and evil” is in the eye of the beholder. It is okay to say that your definition of good and evil is good for you, and my definition of good and evil is good for me. It is from this that the new definition of “tolerance” makes a virtue of “accepting all beliefs and practices.” Consequentially, it implies that “any behavior is okay,” “any behavior is good.” What is acceptable to you is good for you. What is acceptable to me, is good for me. The problem is that, anyone who does not accept ethical relativism is considered bad, and is then labeled “intolerant.” For this reason, Christians, who believe in an absolute good and evil, who believe that there is such a thing as good behavior and sinful, are looked down upon by the world.

Now you might think this is horrible. You might think, “oh no, the church is under persecution. “What will happen to us?” But the answer is “nothing.” The church has survived worse for it stands on Jesus Christ. Christ has told us, In the world you shall **have** tribulation: but be of good cheer; **I have overcome** the world. It is important to remember that the persecution of those who follow God, started long before the change in the definition of the word “Tolerance.” The change of the definition of Tolerance is only a symptom. The persecution God’s people has been here “since the beginning.” Scripture says that the ways of the world are against God. Scripture says that the people of this World are enemies of God. Likewise the ways of God are abomination to the world. For this reason, those who choose

to follow Christ will always face sacrifice and persecution. A theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, called this sacrifice and persecution “The Cost of Discipleship.” In 1Cor, Paul outlines some of the Costs of Discipleship. 1Cor says

From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

It was a warning of the sacrifice and persecution to come. But it is important to remember, who is demanding the sacrifice, to who are we paying the cost? When I first read 1Cor I thought it meant that I should follow Jesus with such an intensity, with such single-minded-ness, that I would reject all the things of the world, even my father and mother, wife and child. I thought that serving Jesus, i.e. being a great Christian, meant sacrificing all that was of worldly importance. At first I thought the cost was being paid to God. I thought I was sacrificing to God.

Now, if that were true I could understand why some people think “following Jesus” is not fun. I think of all the things I have to sacrifice to God. If it being a Christian means sacrificing a lot to God, why would I want to be a Christian? Before I continue, it is important to point out that the Cost of discipleship is not “what we pay to God.” It is not what we do in order “to remain being a Christian.” It’s not the things I suffer for God. It’s not the things I do for God. It’s not for God at all. The Cost of discipleship is a consequence of being a Christian in an unGodly world. The Cost of discipleship is the cost of being a Christian in an unGodly world. The cost of discipleship is not “what we pay to God.” All that has been paid by Jesus’ death on the cross. Through faith in Jesus we became children of God. The cost of discipleship is not “what we pay to God.” The payment of discipleship, is paid to this World. That is a very important thing to realize. When you became a Christian, when you became a child of God, one of the consequences of following Jesus, was that you were going to suffering things because you still lived in a sinful world. The cost of discipleship is a consequence of being a Christian in an unGodly world. The cost of discipleship is the COST of being a Christian in an unGodly world. As it turns out, the cost of being a disciple of Christ, is paid to this world.

But just because there is a cost to following Jesus, there is a reward. When we take into consideration both the positive and negative things, we find an overwhelmingly positive balance. The negatives of our sinful life in this world are vast. All the positive HUMAN gifts of this world cannot outweigh it. But the Grace of God fully outweighs it. Because of what Jesus brings to us, when we

“count the cost” we see a balance which stretches into infinity. It is when we see that positive balance, that we can say with all enthusiasm “I want to follow Jesus!” We know the cost of discipleship and it is worth it!

This by the way, explains the behavior of people of this world. A person without a relationship with Christ cannot be a “follower of Christ”, a disciple of Jesus. A person without a relationship with Christ who tries to “count the cost” of being a disciple of Jesus will not have enough for a positive balance, and will quickly determine “its not worth it.” But a person with Christ who tries to “count the cost” of being a disciple of Jesus both the positive and negative sees an overwhelmingly positive balance. a person with a relationship with Christ sees what Christ has done for him and because of this can truly be a disciple. It is this reason why a Christian can withstand overwhelming suffering on Earth. because he has counted the full cost. As St. Paul said in Romans 8

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Paul counted the cost and found it worth paying. Paul counted the benefits, and found it far outweighed the sacrifices. The Cost of discipleship is the price we pay for being Christians in a unholy world. Yet we are unafraid, because we have “counted the cost.” Because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, because we know God’s love, comfort and hope, the balance is infinitely on the positive.

Brothers and sisters, you know this, but there is a world out there who does not. There are those in the world, who have “counted the cost” and see being a Christian as a burden. They see our desire to follow God, our recognition of good and evil our desire to label behavior good or sinful, as being intolerant. And you know what? No amount of instruction on biblical principles will change them. They need to know Jesus. Only as they have a relationship with Christ, will they be able to see God’s love, comfort and hope. Only as they have a relationship with Christ will they be able to “count the cost” and find it worth it. Only as they have a relationship with Christ will they have any ability to “follow Christ.” God is calling you to share the wonderful news that there is more to this universe than the treasures of this Earth. God is calling you to share the eternal treasures of heaven, treasures which are far more valuable than any treasure of earth, treasures which give power to endure any suffering on earth. Share the wonderful news that they too can become a child of God, and have the security of knowing that there is a

God who loves them who will comfort them when they suffer, and offers the hope of eternal life. Let them know. Amen