

How Far Will You *Follow* Jesus?

Get the picture in Luke 9: Jesus has just fed well over 5,000 (this number was just the men of the multitude) with “*five loaves and two fish*,” vv.11-17; then, while He prayed alone but in the presence of just the twelve disciples, Peter answered Jesus’ question about His identity with those famous words, “*The Christ of God*,” vv.18-21; and finally, Jesus told (again, just His disciples) about His imminent *suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection*, v.22. Then, and in this context, He said “*to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me,’ v.23.*”

Firstly, note that true “discipleship” requires 4 “D’s”: 1) **D**esire, “*If anyone wishes to come after Me*” means the motivation to “*come after*” or *follow* Him must be genuine and properly focused; 2) **D**enial, “*let him deny himself*” requires that His will and way must always supersede that of the disciple; 3) **D**eath, “*and take up his cross daily*” necessitates that the would-be disciple must be ready to *die* for Christ each and every day; and, 4) **D**edication/**D**irection, “*and follow Me*” entails following Jesus whenever and wherever “His way” leads. Such is how Jesus defines “discipleship” and details its requirements.

Secondly, let’s focus on the third element of such *discipleship*, **death**, for it specifically pertains to our title question. Though it may be obvious to some, one particular point may have escaped the notice of others, so... please understand that when Jesus spoke the words “*take up his cross daily*,” a “cross” had no spiritual significance to His hearers for a very simple reason: He hadn’t yet died on one! Thus, He could have just as easily referenced a “hangman’s noose” or any other implement of death. “The cross” as such, had no particular *spiritual* connotation at the time Jesus spoke the words- it just meant a means of death- albeit a gruesome one! So what?

Jesus is making one of the requirements of being His disciple that of “*carrying one’s own implement of death*” EVERY day. That is, being ready and willing to die for Him daily. Though we might want to think of this injunction as metaphorical - as in 1Cor.15:31 where Paul wrote “*I die daily*,” or as in Gal.2:20, “*I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*,” it seems to me that Jesus meant the words more literally... that a true disciple is prepared to physically die for the privilege of being such each and every day. If you doubt this is His meaning, consider the next verse, “*For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it*,” Luke 9:24.

We modern Christians appraise and prize *physical* life highly. Just think of all things we do and all the money and effort we expend to preserve it as long as possible and at all costs. While there is nothing necessarily wrong with this, it does beg the question of whether or not we would really die *physically* FOR our *spiritual* faith and allegiance to Christ? Peter and the other disciples were sure that they would, until the proverbial “rubber” met “the road,” cp. Matt.26:35 and v.56! Of course, once their faith and commitment were bolstered by Jesus’ resurrection and the Holy Spirit’s *comfort*, they all (save John?) DID *physically* live and die for Him! The real question and point of this piece is, “Will we?” Exactly how far will we “*follow*” Jesus in our *discipleship*? To our *own “cross”*? Think soberly brethren, think soberly! (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)