

All In for Jesus

Neil Girrard

After the rich young man (who had wanted to know what he lacked in his pursuit of God and eternal life – Mt. 19:16) departed, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 19:23) The disciples were so shocked at this teaching they asked, “Who then can be saved?” (Mt. 19:25) And then Peter asks Him, “See, we have left all, and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?” (Mt. 19:27) Peter, James, John and Andrew had already “forsook all and followed Him” when Jesus had called them to become “fishers of men.” (Mt. 4:19-22) Likewise, Matthew had left his tax booth when Jesus called him to follow Him. (Mt. 9:9) Later, we find that Paul wrote, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish (literally, dung), that I may gain Christ.” (Phlp. 3:7-8)

The common thread here is that the original disciples and apostles were all in for Jesus. Jesus had plainly taught His disciples, “Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (Lk. 14:33) This was plainly understood even at the time of Jesus and this *requirement* was upon *all* who truly followed Christ. This was demonstrated when Ananias and Sapphira kept back part of the proceeds from the sale of their property and lied (their real crime against the Holy Spirit) about it to the apostles. (Acts 5:1-5) Those who think this is no longer required from those who follow Christ are mistaken as the Revelation reminds us that the end time saints will overcome the power of Satan “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” (Rev. 12:11)

An often overlooked truth is that we cannot initiate or simply install the kingdom of God. That is, we can only bring the kingdom of God into our midst by hearing and obeying God. (Mt. 6:10) This is also part of forsaking all – we must forsake our own agendas and even power and abilities and refuse to use anything we have or are apart from His leading and guiding. This is not a passive, docile, inactive waiting for commands to come to us from spiritual realms (that’s more likely to connect us with the demonic!) but rather a surrender of one’s entire life to Christ and a determined choice to do whatever God reveals whenever and however He reveals it as we prayerfully step through the responsibilities that are upon us in this life. We give Him the right to “upset our apple cart” and change the direction of the whole of our life if He so leads. This does not mean that we decide deep, life-changing issues on a mere whim or at some mere spiritual “whisper” but rather, by careful deliberation and confirmation through the Scriptures and prayer, we deliberately and with full (or at least informed) consciousness of what may befall us, we take up our cross and follow Him.

The “Church” Detour

The “church” has largely stopped teaching the necessity of hearing God and taking up one’s cross to follow Christ. Instead you need an ear-scratching spiritual guru who will tell you all you need to know and you should pay him or her handsomely for their services. As a result, the kingdom of God is not so readily seen and experienced – this is *not* a coincidence. Equally devastating is that many “wedding maids” will be foolishly trying to find their guru while the door to heaven is being closed in their absence from the presence of the King. (Mt. 25:9)

Much time and many lives are wasted by not instructing (or in many cases not even allowing!) the converted souls to develop a relationship with Jesus on their own. Many simply

expect this to “just happen” because they attend “a good church” and read the Bible and pray at special prayer meetings before the “services” at “church” and, of course, before every meal. Most new converts don’t have any clue that having a bunch of young believers running around thinking they can hear God for themselves is just bad for “church” business and competes with the “pastor’s” ability to scratch and soothe ears. It really is no wonder that the modern “church” is **POWERLESS**. Jesus is replaced with a mascot (named Jesus) and a “pastor”/king (a well meaning guy, of course, but too smart for his own good because he doesn’t seem to fully realize that Jesus can’t be replaced and that He doesn’t need to be mediated for. – 1 Tim. 2:5) There are indeed many well-meaning people in “churches” and a lot of them probably do really love the Lord on some levels, but they have been misled right into ignorance and the “Jesus” they love is, in reality, a different Jesus.

This comes to the surface when we watch a good movie that inspires us – perhaps like the movie “Brother Sun Sister Moon” (about Francis of Assisi) or “The End of the Spear” (about Nate Saint and the other missionaries martyred in Ecuador in 1956) or watch the story of Rich Mullens (the “ragamuffin” for Jesus in the 1980s and 90s). We love these movies. We love the stories about guys who leave it all behind to follow Christ and sacrifice everything. We watch films like this and believe that this is what the Christian life is all about, that this guy got it right and we know deep in our souls that we should be – and we even want to be! – like this. **BUT** when we compare that to our own life, it quickly becomes obvious that we simply are not like the guy in the story, at least not yet. Something within us strongly identifies with and craves to be that kind of follower of Christ, but most often the reality is that our admiration for that lifestyle has not moved us beyond mere “entertainment” of the concept and actually into truly laying it all down for Christ.

This is probably how it is for a lot of “church” people. There is some part of them that identifies with the truth and they really desire to lay it all down at His feet – but they have allowed themselves to be deceived by the kind of thinking that says merely “identifying with” and “entertaining the notion” is the same thing as actually “living that way.” These are seriously missing out. It is much easier to have compassion for them once we’ve seen that the same thing is really still in our own life.

The closer we really move toward Jesus through obedience to His moment-by-moment leading, the more He begins to change us into what we, before, could only imagine or entertain. But it only comes with taking up our crosses and it doesn’t happen overnight or instantaneously. Sometimes we don’t even see it until we’ve gotten past certain points in our journey with Him and He shows us, “See what I’ve done in you, son.”

Hear Him

As we progress, we will find that the only way we can even continue through both our ordinary routine as well as the struggles of our life is if we yield to Christ and lay down all our human strength and “smarts” and invite Him to speak to us and into our situation. We will discover that the only way to learn how to hear the voice of the Spirit is to listen and keep practicing listening, particularly (but certainly not limited to!) as we read the Bible. This sounds ridiculously simple but it is routinely overlooked. And this is no mere cliché. Unless we spend time with Him and follow those little promptings, they will just grow quieter, less urgent, less important, until they are silent. But this is the Voice of God and we can kill even the sound of that Voice which, at various times, whispers or cries out within us. We simply must choose to

let Him speak by keeping our spiritual ears tuned to Him. Many don't do this and the "sound" of His Voice within them dies.

We have to listen and listen and listen and obey when we hear. The more we spend time listening, the more we hear, the more fulfilled we are, the more we know how to live, how to treat our spouse, how to lead our children, how to handle the stress of this life. We become more relaxed in this process and we start to just trust His leading and act on it rather than feel like we have to intellectually weigh how everything will turn out and struggle so much with doubt, and we start to find out how much He really speaks to us and how much easier it is when we just go with it as He speaks.

There is an inherent danger in listening though – our hearts are deceitful and wicked (Jer. 17:9) and, as important as developing our spiritual listening skill is, it can become the end rather than the means. Even when we are as fully surrendered as we know how to be, there are still yet unrevealed pockets of deception and evil. If this were not true, we would be perfectly sinless and completely like Christ, a condition we know will not happen in this life. (1 Jn. 1:8) It is interesting that some who believe that they are not yet perfected still have difficulty in believing that their flesh is not as dead as they want it to be. These will teach that crucifying the flesh is a once for all kind of thing instead of a need to die daily. (see 1 Cor. 15:30) Yet there is none who will claim that they have "arrived," but instead speak of seeing God bring them along step by step, or as Paul wrote, "from glory to glory." (2 Cor. 3:18) Those who are in the most danger are those who let their trust become subtly shifted from God to their own ability to hear. This is more easily done than most believe. Rather than pressing on to know God as who and what He is, these are content to receive messages from the voice they just know is His. What is overlooked is that Satan can easily imitate the way we usually hear God and God will allow this deception as a test to see whether we love Him or we simply love to be instructed by some voice so that we might feel "spiritual" or even superior. It is not enough to hear a voice – all spiritual instructions must line up with the rightly divided, rightly applied word of truth.

Yet in all this, it remains a humbling truth that there is more value in stumbling while trying to follow Him than it is to slowly strangulate in a pool of demonic deception or our own filth and vomit by not following Him at all. If we would look at how we've taught our children how to walk, we would instantly see the truth of this. We do not chastise our children for falling down while they learn to keep their balance and put their next foot forward – but we do when our child sits down and refuses to move, even in the face of imminent danger! It is in this way that the so-called "Christian church" today is simply missing CHRIST! They need Him so desperately and yet He is the primary Person that is ignored almost completely. What a grand deception!

It is humbling, even embarrassing, when we're finally forced to admit that we've lived so much of our life as a "Christian" but really we have been nothing of the sort (yet completely thought we were!) What this really shows is that we still labor under a lot of spiritual pride. God help us!

Discipleship

This is the discipling process that is in view here and it is sobering indeed to finally recognize how crippling and lethal the "church" is to the discipleship process. The "church" tries to make people become believers – they will put forth the reasons one should have faith and they will give reasonable and plausible explanations for nearly everything one can think of – all to get a person to believe. This is not entirely without value but Jesus commanded us to go and

make disciples. (Mt. 28:19) When we stop to consider that “making disciples” (what Jesus wants) is very different from “making believers” (what the “church” does), it is instructive to recognize that the phrase “make believe” is a very apt description of what the “church” produces.

It is also important to notice that the command to go and make disciples is a *verb*. Action is required on our part – and not just action, but obedient action. Disobedience will cause us to turn our life from the way of following Christ and God onto the way of following our self or reason or intellect or will. We must forsake *all* or we cannot be His disciple and we must first *be* a disciple before we can *make* new ones for the King. And if we are rich – whether in material goods or knowledge or in some characteristic or ability – we will have difficulty even entering the kingdom of God because what is meant to be a spiritual transaction becomes contaminated by our possessions, knowledge or abilities. Forsaking all is not optional for some – it is a *requirement* upon all just as surely as the command to go and make disciples is upon all.

Those we would disciple must also be willing to learn from us and must be willing to forsake all – not for or to us but for and to Christ. So many have been “churched” and want nothing to do with “Christianity” or even God in many cases. And many of those who are still in the “church” want nothing to do with anyone who would take them away from their favorite ear-scratching “pastor,” “apostle,” “prophet” or spiritual guru. With the backdrop of today’s apostate environment of churchianity, *being* one who is willing to be a true disciple who will forsake all and be all in for Jesus is as rare as is *finding* someone else who wants to be His disciple willing to forsake all.

All In?

Many might *claim* to be all in for Jesus but these are often only like the Israelites whom Paul described as possessing zeal without knowledge. (Rom. 10:2) They are zealous to “win souls” or bring in converts to their “church” or even zealous for their own understanding of Jesus and God or to make more people just like themselves so that they feel justified in their own version of “Christianity.” But when we come to the test of “forsake all,” the vast majority of those who claim to belong to Him do not pass this test. Some do but many, even most, do not. What have we become? Whatever it is and whatever labels we may put upon ourselves, we simply are not His disciples.

Jesus said, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.” (Mt. 19:29) Let us look carefully at this list: houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, lands. These are the things we are called to forsake so that we might be His disciples! And immediately the cries of the carnal “theologians” comes to our ears – this is a “spiritual” lesson, a metaphor, a parable. No, it is not. The “theologians” who espouse this noise are deceived and are not His disciples any more than we are if we have not forsaken all. Squirm all you want but until you decide to practice obedience to Christ on this matter, you will not be His disciple and whether He will consider you “saved” on judgment day is a gamble you will have to take. Certainly the “theologians” will assure you that you are but whether or not He does – and He is the final judge, not the “theologians – is a question only He can answer.

Even those who believe themselves to have forsaken all would do well to seek Him and be certain there is nothing left in one’s life to forsake. It would be tragic to deceive oneself into forsaking most or nearly all when the standard is *all*. Let us prostrate ourselves before God and let Him make a list of the things that need to disappear from our lives so that we may truly bring our lives into obedience to His will for us. Hear this clearly – submit yourselves to *Him* and

don't just start throwing everything you own into a trash dumpster or start loading up a truck and heading off to your favorite charity. Let *Him* put *His* finger on the things *He* wants to go and deal with them exactly as *He* instructs. This is not about your stuff or your relationships or your knowledge or your abilities – it is about you and whether or not you truly belong completely and only to Him. It is not necessarily about doing away with these things, especially the people (though even that may be something He may require of us under certain circumstances), but about refusing to allow these things or people to come between us and Christ in any way. And certainly this requirement to forsake all is not an excuse to abandon one's family or life responsibilities so as to enter into a "ministry" and "serve God" at the expense of those He would have you lay your life down for!

But if we are unwilling to lay all things at His feet, let us remove His name from our lips and hearts and quit deceiving ourselves that we are His disciples. Such a claim is only deception and He is not interested in receiving lip service. There are any number of people around the world already doing that – He calls upon us to give Him our all.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org

Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org

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