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## *A Barn, a Tower, and a King's Campaign*

*So is he who lays up treasure for himself,  
and is not rich toward God.*

—Jesus Christ

Jesus has been teaching His disciples principles and mysteries concerning the Kingdom from Heaven. Previously He said that they are blessed because they have ears to hear and understand, while those “outside” have dull ears, hearing but not understanding (Mt 13:11-17). Having been called to be God’s chosen people, the disciples are preparing themselves to be God’s chosen people and enter His kingdom. Even so, there is a cost to discipleship which a believer should understand before he commits to life under God’s New Covenant. Jesus explains some of the opposition a disciple should expect to face:

Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (Mt 10:21-22).

He also explains the commitment expected of a disciple:

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what

profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Mt 16:24-27).

Jesus gives fair warning: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required” (Lk 12:48). In Luke, Jesus teaches three parables concerning the cost of discipleship and some of the hard choices a disciple might face.

### “The Foolish Barn Builder”

The parable of “The Foolish Barn Builder” considers what a disciple should choose to do with his wealth. Jesus is responding to a request from a man in the crowd: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me” (Lk 12:13). The man wants Jesus to command his brother to give him a more equitable share of their father’s estate. Jesus responds to the man, “Who made Me a judge or an arbiter over you?” (Lk 12:14). Of course, Christ’s answer is confusing to His audience because, if He is the Messiah, then He is also their King and has the right, even the responsibility, to judge this matter.<sup>1</sup> The audience does not understand that the purpose of Christ’s first coming is not to establish His kingdom, but to sacrifice Himself and become the Savior of mankind.

Take notice of another aspect of Jesus’ response to the man’s demand that his brother give him more of the inheritance. Jesus has been teaching that the Mystery Age of the kingdom is a time of preparation for the growth and harvesting of fruit; kingdom citizens are to prepare themselves, make disciples, and become worthy to enter into the Kingdom from Heaven when Christ returns. Jesus warns His disciples not to be like this man who is preoccupied with his inheritance in this life: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Lk 12:15). For a disciple of Christ, this lifetime is not the time for amassing

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps they are expecting the Messiah to judge this matter and show that He has great wisdom like Solomon.

wealth on this earth; this lifetime is the time to gain an inheritance in the world to come.

Jesus then illustrates the foolishness of gathering riches on this earth with the parable of "The Foolish Barn Builder":

The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Lk 12:16-21).

This rich man has benefited from a plentiful harvest, but the fact that the man's land has yielded abundantly does not indicate anything significant concerning his righteousness before God. "[God] makes His sun rise on the wicked and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45). What is significant is that the plentiful harvest gives the rich man an opportunity to consider what he should do with his abundance. He has a choice: build bigger barns to store all of his produce or use his earthly resources to lay up treasure in Heaven (as Jesus commands in His New Law).

Logically, this rich man is a believer, and Jesus' lesson about what a believer should do with his wealth is directed toward His disciples. The rich man decides to use his wealth to provide himself a life of luxury: "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." Plainly, he makes the wrong choice: "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'" The rich man acts as a fool would act, choosing to secure his earthly future instead of choosing to do what God would want him to do with his wealth.

Indeed, who will possess this man's wealth? Not the rich man, for his life on this earth is over. The rich man was foolish

to build bigger barns because earthly structures cannot secure wealth for earthly life, much less provide for one's life in the world to come. In fact, building bigger barns did not benefit him. No one has a guarantee to be alive on this earth tomorrow. Thus Jesus commands His disciples:

For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Lk 12:30-34).

### “The Tower Builder”

Leading up to the parable of “The Tower Builder,” Jesus continues His teaching about the cost of discipleship and informs His audience: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk 14:26-27). Jesus is setting some limitations for those believers who desire to be His disciples. To be His disciple, a believer has to make some difficult choices.

One difficult choice a believer should make, if he wants to be a disciple, is to love Jesus more than his own family. In the Bible, when the term “love” is used in the context of a covenant, it has a technical meaning. In ancient covenants, to “love” someone means to treat them right according to the terms of the covenant. For example, in a typical Hittite treaty covenant, a vassal king would promise (be required) to “love” the suzerainty king who had just conquered the vassal's people; to “love” the conquering king meant that the vassal king would obey all the commandments stipulated in the covenant.

The book of Deuteronomy records the Old Covenant in the form of an ancient Hittite treaty covenant.<sup>2</sup> In chapters five and six, God hands down some of the commandments and statutes which the Israelites are required to obey. God then commands them, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your life, and with all your strength” (Deu 6:5). Similarly, Jesus gives His disciples the New Covenant, and later He explicitly directs, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn 14:15).

When Jesus tells His audience that, in order to be His disciples, they must “hate” their family, He is demanding that their loyalty to Him and His Covenant come before their covenant loyalty to their families. Jesus explains that becoming His disciples will cause divisions within their homes and their families might turn against them (cf. Mt 10:21-22; Lk 12:51-53). This is one of the costs of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Another difficult possibility a believer should face, if he desires to become a disciple, is that he will likely suffer as he follows the example of Christ: “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk 14:27). In his first epistle, Peter emphasizes a Christian’s calling to suffer:

But if, when producing good and suffering, you endure it patiently, this finds favor before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on our behalf, leaving us a written-copy, that you should follow in His steps (1Pe 2:20-21).

The “written-copy” to which Peter refers is a student’s primer; it was a chalkboard on which a student would write his letters over and over, imitating his teacher. Thus, a “Christian”<sup>3</sup> is not just a believer in Christ, but a disciple who follows in the steps of Christ, imitating Him until he becomes like Him.

Peter goes on to explain that, under the New Covenant, a disciple should expect to suffer. Peter provides specific examples of suffering for the Lord; whether a slave, a wife, a

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see George R. Law, “The Form of the New Covenant in Matthew,” (2012), *American Theological Inquiry*, Vol. 5 (Issue 2), 17-32.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *christianos* (meaning “little christs”) was first used in Antioch to describe Gentile disciples of Christ (Ac 11:26).

husband, or a citizen, all of Christ's disciples are to "produce good," even when doing so causes them to suffer for Christ's sake. A disciple's good actions, even though such actions might engender his suffering, will earn him favor from God, because he is acting in accordance with the will of God: "having perceived that to this you were called, so that you might inherit a blessing" (1Pe 3:9; cf. 4:12-14, 19). Likewise, as Paul was departing from Asia Minor, "[he was] strengthening the lives of the disciples [and] exhorting them to continue in the faith, [reminding them], 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Ac 14:22). Suffering is another cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Jesus teaches the parable of "The Tower Builder" to illustrate that a disciple must make a difficult decision concerning the cost of following Jesus:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish"? (Lk 14:28-30).

Jesus warns against too hastily committing to become His disciple; one must consider the cost of discipleship and be willing to bear it. Like the tower builder, a disciple is embarking on a tremendous endeavor which will require great effort and might cost him dearly, so he must not fail to take the necessary steps to accomplish the objective. If he fails to complete his objective, he might become an object of ridicule.

In summary, a believer must consider whether or not he will be able to endure the suffering which is required of a disciple following in the footsteps of Christ. Furthermore, a believer must consider, if he becomes a disciple, whether or not he will be able to finish—to be "faithful to the end," even to death (Mt 10:21-22). Primarily, a believer must decide if, as a disciple, he can maintain his covenant loyalty to Christ above his covenant loyalty to all others.

## “The King’s Campaign”

Jesus teaches another parable considering the cost of discipleship:

Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple (Lk 14:31-33).

The parable of “The King’s Campaign” presents another difficult decision a believer desiring to become a disciple of Christ must face: he must be willing to lose all that he has. The example in this parable is a king going to war. Before anything happens, the king must decide if the spoils of war are worth the risk of losing everything. He must also judge the strength of his army and whether it will be able to defeat his opponent’s army. Even then, if the king goes to war and afterwards realizes that he has miscalculated, he must quickly try to make peace with his enemy. Above all else, the principle taught here is that a king who goes to war must understand that he might lose everything, so he must decide beforehand if he is willing to do so. Jesus applies this principle to the believer who desires to become His disciple: if he is not willing to lose everything, he should not become His disciple.

Jesus has already told His disciples:

If anyone desires to follow Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own life? (Mt 16:24-26).

Indeed, a believer’s life in the Kingdom of God is worth more than the whole of this present world. Jesus also asks this question: “What shall a man give in exchange for his life [in the kingdom from heaven]?” Obviously, there is nothing so valuable on this earth. Nevertheless, Jesus is offering a bargain:

He will give His disciple “*covenant life*” inside His kingdom in exchange for His disciple giving up his present life on this earth.

As Jesus sends His disciples out to minister, He further warns them:

Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the life. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both life and body in Gehenna (Mt 10:27-28).

Those who persecute disciples of Christ might kill their bodies, but they cannot take away a disciple’s “*covenant life*.” On the other hand, a believer who becomes a disciple but has failed to count the cost, and thus does not lose his life on this earth for the sake of Christ,<sup>4</sup> will lose his “*covenant life*” in the Kingdom of God. Jesus warns that the “*covenant life*” of an unfaithful disciple will be ruined (“destroyed”) when he is cast outside of the Kingdom of God to live in the valley of Gehenna, where worthless trash is dumped.

Repeatedly, as Jesus is handing down the New Covenant (recorded in Matthew 5-7) He explicitly warns His disciples about the possibility of being cast outside into Gehenna (cf. 5:22, 29, 30). His first warning of being “thrown outside” is given while He is explaining the purpose of disciples serving Him under the New Covenant:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Mt 5:13-16).

In these comparisons, Jesus describes how salt and light can lose usefulness and become worthless: the salt loses its flavor and the light is hidden from view. Likewise, a disciple can become worthless. Jesus gives a similar warning to not become

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<sup>4</sup> For example, a disciple might quit for fear of those persecuting him.

worthless to conclude His parables concerning counting the cost of discipleship:

Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Lk 14:34-35).

In summary, a believer should consider the cost before he decides to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. If a disciple fails in serving Christ, he might be mocked by others who will say that he abandoned (“hated” because of his covenant loyalty to Christ) his family and friends for nothing. A believer should also understand that, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, he will have to endure some suffering, even as Christ suffered, and some of those whom he now counts as friends (even his family) will probably become his enemies. Thirdly, a disciple must be willing to lose all that this life offers in light of the rewards of the world to come. Lastly, Jesus gives fair warning that it is possible for a disciple to fail even to the point of breaking the New Covenant, and a consequence of a disciple’s failure is that he might become worthless and be cast outside, unable to live with Christ inside His kingdom.