



"To forsake Christ for the world, is to leave a treasure for a trifle, eternity for a moment, reality for a shadow."

—William Jenkyn

13-Feb-15

How Expensive Is Your Religion? (Part One)

Some years back, I had the opportunity to drive through southern Illinois several times. I was always amazed at the thousands of acres of corn and how precise the rows were. They may not always have been straight—perhaps going around the occasional tree or boulder—but each row was spaced the same distance from the next one, and the next one, and the next one, forming beautiful patterns as they followed the contours of the land.

In recent years, farmers have installed GPS in their tractors, and they can now do some amazing things. While visiting recently in southwest Colorado—Mesa Verde country—my wife and I saw plowing that defied description: field after field with rows stretching out towards the horizon, perfectly straight and symmetrical. They were so flawless it was as if they had been drawn by digital animation.

This is quite different from days gone by, when a farmer would plow behind his mules, horses, or oxen, and it took all his concentration to manage the animals and the plow in order to cut a straight line. Nowadays, the farmer

can sit in an air-conditioned tractor cab, listen to music or talk radio, play on his phone, maybe go in the back to make a sandwich—and still plow a furrow to make Harry Truman envious!

In this light, consider [Luke 9:57-62](#), a passage on the cost of discipleship:

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And [Jesus](#) said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the [kingdom of God](#)." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of [God](#)."

The Contemporary English Version (CEV) renders verse 62, "Anyone who starts plowing and keeps looking back isn't worth a thing to God's Kingdom."

Plowing in Jesus' day was done, not with a tractor, but behind an animal, something we have little or no experience doing. Few of us have spent any time walking behind a plow—and a garden tiller does not count as a plow! What was [it](#) like, trying to keep an animal-pulled plow upright and true? YouTube offers many videos of just this thing, people trying to hold a plow straight and keep a team moving forward. It does not look easy. It seems that if the plowman took his eyes off what he was doing, the plow would fall over.

So, once a farmer became proficient enough to hold the plow up and had the animals trained to move ahead, he would have to keep his eyes fixed on the end of the row to plow a straight line. Back in the day, Farmer John would send his son or his hired hand out to plow a field. He would come by later to check on him and perhaps find that the furrows were crooked. The plowman had started plowing but perhaps kept looking back. He was not committed to the task at hand or was not focused on the goal.

[Hebrews 10:39](#) (CEV) reads, "We are not like those people who turn back and get destroyed. We will keep on having [faith](#) until we are saved." Are God's requirements too exacting and difficult for us? Are we committed to the way forward, or are we spending time looking back?

[Luke 14:26-27](#) (CEV) is a passage used in pre-[baptism](#) counseling:

You cannot be my disciple unless you [love](#) me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with Me unless you love me more than you love your own life. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

When embarking on a quest, we must first "count the cost," as these verses are often labeled. In verse 28, Christ speaks of a building project, and before we start, the smart person sits down and figures out what it will cost. Does he have enough to finish it? He also uses the illustration of a king going to war. He must first look at his resources and ask if his 10,000 men can conquer the enemy with 20,000.

About these verses, commentator Matthew Henry makes the point that "we must consider the expenses of our religion." *Expensive* means "involving a high price or sacrifice." Is our calling worth our jobs, our families, our lives? Have we truly counted the cost?

Have we ever wanted something and then decided that it would take too much effort to acquire it? In the end, we decided it was not worth it; it was just too expensive! Maybe we desired something and were willing to move heaven and earth to get it. We would work long hours, perhaps take on another job, study, skip meals, lose sleep—we would do whatever it took.

Where does the Kingdom of God fit? Is it "not worth the effort," or does it merit the sacrifices?

Now, we cannot "earn" our salvation. Remember, however, that Christ says in [Luke 9:62](#), "Anyone who starts plowing and keeps looking back isn't worth a thing to God's Kingdom." Once we start down this road to the Kingdom, we must keep moving forward and not look back. We are all

aware that salvation is a gift and not earned by any works, but we should also know that God requires our full obedience and cooperation to receive this gift (see [John 14:15](#); [I Corinthians 7:19](#); [Matthew 19:17](#); [I John 2:4](#); [3:4](#); [5:2-3](#); etc.).

In [Matthew 10:34-39](#), Christ warns His disciples that persecution will come and that they will have to make hard choices:

Do not think that I came to bring [peace](#) on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

In some cases, to answer God's call will involve leaving family and friends behind, perhaps symbolically, perhaps literally. We will look into this more fully in Part Two.

- Mike Ford

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Awesome Cost of Salvation](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The world's religions are in abject bondage to falsehood because they do not observe the Passover. Freedom comes to God's called out ones incrementally from continuing on the way- the relationship between God and us. It is this relationship which is the most important thing Christ has died for. We need to be sobered at the awesomeness of the cost to set us free from sin- how far Christ was willing to be pushed. Immense have been the preparations for our ransom- involving billions of years (Hebrews 11:3, I Corinthians 10:11) and

the death of our Savior. Because we have been purchased, we have an obligation to our Purchaser.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Parables of Counting the Cost](#)

by Martin G. Collins

In Luke 14:25-33, two parables and an exhortation urge us to forsake all that we have as a mandatory condition to becoming Christ's disciples. One main lesson is emphasized in these scriptures: the nature and influence of true discipleship.

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