

Title: The Cost of Discipleship – pt.2

Text: Matthew 10.37-39

Theme: same

Occasion: 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Prop Stmt. When your premise begins with the culture crafting the message, your conclusion will always be wrong.

## The Legacy

The German church before W.W.II was a state-church. The government and the church worked closely together. The result was that Christianity was cultural and the ministry was just another profession. In a perfect world the political leadership and the spiritual leadership are on the same page (such as the kingdom). The church has suffered from this idea through the years by those who think that spiritual leadership combined with political leadership can bring about the kingdom of God on the earth. This has led to spiritual leaders attempting to pursue political and at times military causes through the church, which is not what the church was designed to do. A leader in the church also had political influence and power. He was more than a voice to be heard, he in many cases had a seat at the table. Having a seat at the table of power, brings prestige, influence, notoriety. Once invited, it is tempting to hold on. The German church had such a position.

If you were born into a German family in those days, it was very likely that you would go to the church to be baptized into the Lutheran church as an infant. This sort of held you over until you could go to your confirmation classes, which would prepare you for your first communion. Confirmation classes were not a bad idea. This was a time to make certain that every child was exposed to the gospel. Unfortunately as time went on, the class was designed to make you a good Lutheran, a good German Lutheran and not necessarily a Christian. The two phrases were intermingled, and it depended much upon the one teaching as to how much gospel was actually presented. But the effect of that was this. If you completed the class, you were considered to be a Christian, because you would publicly state that you believed in Christ. On a popular level this often resulted in people viewing the completion of the class as being salvation instead of a personal trust in Christ. On a professional level, the ministry was another career opportunity that was certainly above the level of a common laborer, but was not quite on par with a doctor, lawyer, etc.

The ministry was a profession in which one sought to climb the corporate ladder. The church was a place for people to attend for an hour on Sunday. That was what defined being a Christian in Bonhoeffer's day. Bonhoeffer wrote, "The Christian life comes to mean nothing more than living the world and as the world, in being no different from the world, in fact, in being prohibited from being different from the world for the sake of grace. The upshot of it all is that my only duty as a Christian is to leave the world for an hour or so on a Sunday morning and go to church to be assured that my sins are all forgiven." (51) This type of Christianity, was not what Bonhoeffer understood to be real

Christianity. True Christianity was not leaving the world to go to the church, it was first – knowing Christ and then being Christ to each other and to the world.

I love his little book entitled, *Life Together*, in which he describes what life should be like within the body of Christ. His experience in a seminary setting, living with students was the background for this. But, the complete failure of the official church to do what was right, was the background for him writing, “The Cost of Discipleship.” In this book he uses the term “cheap grace” to describe the teaching that promises forgiveness of sins but nothing else. He is not calling for a works salvation. He is arguing for a pure gospel that will result in a changed life. The German church was offering forgiveness of sins indiscriminately.

Question: Does God forgive sin? Does God forgive all sin? If God can forgive sin, but he does not forgive all sin, then on what basis does he forgive some but not others? The basis is repentance and faith in Christ.

That was Bonhoeffer’s point. If there was no repentance, if there was no genuine faith in Christ, then you cannot offer the promise of forgiveness. Forgiveness is powerful, but it is not cheap. It should not be thrown around indiscriminately.

## **GRACE AND DISCIPLESHIP**

***Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church.*** We are fighting today for costly grace. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian “conception” of God. (without teaching anything else) In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin.

Note: We see this same issue so clear in the religious society today. The message of the church has been reduced to this. Do you want a happy life? Do you want a happy marriage? Do you want to be successful at work? Are you frustrated with negativity in your life? Are you being held back by giants in your life? Would you like power for living? Would you like to release the full potential that is in your life? Would you like to be set free from past problems? God wants to forgive you. God wants to help you be happy. Come to church and find out how you can find yourself and be all that you were made to be. That message is phenomenally popular. It is appealing, and partially true.

***Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner.*** *Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. "All for sin could not atone." Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world’s standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin.*

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal

confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

It is very common today for people who want to build a church that will attract people to find out what do people want in the church. They don't want negativity. The argument is, we have enough negative news in the world, I want to go some place where things are positive and happy. So, we turn the church into Disney World. We only tell them the good news. God wants to forgive your sin. That is good news. But there is also bad news. In fact, you cannot really understand the good news (Romans 3.21) until you understand the bad news (Romans 1-3) When you only teach that God forgives sin, then you end up with the justification of sin, and not the justification of the sinner.

“The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ, Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace. But those who try to use this grace as a dispensation from following Christ are simply deceiving themselves.” When theology is used as an excuse for disobedience, something is dreadfully wrong with your theology.

Bonhoeffer made a very clear call for sanctification to follow justification. His term for sanctification was discipleship. His term for justification was the call. The call to follow Christ in the NT was always followed by discipleship. He argues...

### **THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP**

The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. .... It displays not the slightest interest in the psychological reason for a man's religious decisions. And why? For the simple reason that the cause behind the immediate following of call by response is Jesus Christ Himself. 61

**Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.** It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son. ... There is trust in God, but no following of Christ. 64

Remember that Bonhoeffer saw a Christianity that for the minister was a profession. For the people it was a customary obligation of Easter and Christmas and perhaps a weekly commitment of an hour. If I am not mistaken, the church was supported by the government through the taxes of the people. You get the picture? So, when Bonhoeffer goes to NYC and goes to church in Harlem he lives in between two worlds. The world of the elite seminary and the church of the people. Ironically, there was more gospel in the church than there was in the seminary that was supposed to be training ministers for the church. The seminary, he came to see had very little to do with real people, and real problems. It was a profession. He could not reconcile the call of Christ even in the sermon on the mount with this picture. Back home in Germany he wondered what kind of a Christianity or church is this, that will not speak out about the treatment of the Jews? Jesus was flesh and blood who did not live in stone structures, but lived with the people.

Therefore, the call to follow Christ is the call to minister to people. On this point, some people have erroneously concluded that Bonhoeffer was saying that a better Christianity could be found outside of the church. What he was saying was that the real church could only function outside of the fake one.

(back to the quotes)

He wants to follow, but feels obliged to insist on his own terms to the level of human understanding. The disciple places himself at the Master's disposal, but at the same time retains the right to dictate his own terms. But then discipleship is no longer discipleship, but a program of our own to be arranged to suit ourselves, and to be judged in accordance with the standards of rational ethic. 66

If we would follow Jesus we must take certain definite steps. The first step, which follows the call, cuts the disciple off from his previous existence. ... The first step places the disciple in the situation where faith is possible. If he refuses to follow and stays behind, he does not learn how to believe. 66-67

## **DISCIPLESHIP AND THE CROSS**

Jesus Christ must suffer and be rejected. (Mark 8:31-38) This "must" is inherent in the promise of God—the Scripture must be fulfilled. Here there is a distinction between suffering and rejection. Had He only suffered, Jesus might still have been applauded as the Messiah. 95

**Jesus is a rejected Messiah. His rejection robs the passion of its halo of glory. It must be a passion without honor.** Suffering and rejection sum up the whole cross of Jesus. To die on the cross means to die despised and rejected of men. Suffering and rejection are laid upon Jesus as a divine necessity, and every attempt to prevent it is the work of the devil, especially when it comes from his own disciples; for it is in fact an attempt to prevent Christ from being Christ. (Peter in Matthew 16)

That shows how *the very notion of a suffering Messiah was scandal to the Church*. ... Peter's protest displays his own unwillingness to suffer and that means that Satan has gained entry into the Church, and is trying to tear it away from the cross of its Lord.

Note: When the church (Christianity) adopts a theology, methodology that seeks to avoid suffering at all costs, it is denying the very Savior and the gospel on which it is supposed to stand. That was the decision that was made by the German church. That is the decision that is made over and over today. We want a Jesus who suffered for us, but we don't want the rejection that comes with it.

Jesus must therefore make it clear beyond all doubt that the "must" of suffering applies to his disciples no less than to himself. ... Discipleship mean adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross. 96 [*See John 15:20-21*]

When Jesus begins to unfold this inescapable truth to His disciples, He once more sets them free to choose or reject Him. "If any man would come after me," He says. For it is not a matter of course, not even among the disciples. Nobody can be forced, nobody can even be expected to come. He says rather, "If any man" is prepared to spurn all other offers which come his way in order to follow Him. Once again, everything is left for the individual to decide.... 96-97

To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only Him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. ... All that self-denial can say is: "He leads the way, keep close to Him."  
"...and take up his cross." ... Only when we have become completely oblivious of self are we ready to bear the cross for His sake. If in the end we know only Him, if we have ceased to notice the pain of our own cross, we are indeed looking only unto Him. If Jesus had not so graciously prepared us for this word, we should have found it unbearable. 97

To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. ... the suffering which is an essential part of the specifically Christian life.

It is not suffering per se but suffering-and-rejection, and not rejection for any cause of conviction of our own, but rejection for the sake of Christ. **If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the gospel into emotional uplift which makes no costly demands and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity... We have then forgotten that the cross means rejection and shame as well as suffering.**

Note: It is comments like this that have put some of the modern Jews in a difficult position. At the Holocaust museum in Washington D.C. much is made of the fact that the German church spoke of the Jews as being the Christ-killers who were rightfully under the judgment of God and therefore it was fine to punish and abuse them. To the Jews, Christianity is blamed in part for their atrocities. So, how do you reconcile Bonhoeffer to this? He was a man who smuggled Jews out. Who called upon his own church to speak up for the Jews, but to Bonhoeffer, it was because of Christ, he had to do this, not because of Christ that the Jews needed to be punished. So, if the Jews today, mention Bonhoeffer as a hero, they find themselves in the difficult position of elevating a person who believed in Christ as the Messiah.

The Psalmist was lamenting that he was despised and rejected of men, and that is an essential quality of the suffering of the cross. But this notion has ceased to be intelligible to a Christianity which can no longer see any difference between an ordinary human life and life committed to Christ. The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest.

Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, he has only got to pick it up there is no

need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself... Every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection. 98

But each has a different share: some God deems worthy of the highest form of suffering, and given them the grace of martyrdom, while others He does not allow to be tempted above that they are able to bear....

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. ... we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death—we give over our lives to death. ... When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. ...death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man [or nature] at his call. Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die...

The call to discipleship... means both death and life... [It] sets the Christian in the middle of the daily arena against sin and the devil. Every day he encounters new temptations, and every day he must suffer anew for Jesus Christ's sake. The wounds and scars he receives in the fray are living tokens of this participation in the cross of his Lord. 99

But there is another kind of suffering and shame which the Christian is not spared. While ... only the sufferings of Christ are a means of atonement, yet...the Christian also has to undergo temptation [and] bear the sins of others; he too must bear their shame and be driven like a scapegoat from the gates of the city. (Heb. 13:12-15) ...The passion of Christ strengthens him to overcome the sins of others by forgiving them. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2) ...

Suffering then is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master... That is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true Church... If we refuse to take up our cross and submit to suffering and rejection at the hands of men, we forfeit our fellowship with Christ and have ceased to follow Him. But if we lose our lives in His service and carry out cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ. The opposite of discipleship is to be ashamed of Christ and His cross and all the offense which the cross brings in its train.

Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ... It is a joy and token of His grace. ... Christ transfigures for His own [the early Christian martyrs] the hour of their moral agony by granting them the unspeakable assurance of His presence. In the hour of the cruelest torture they bear for His sake, they are made partakers in the perfect joy and bliss of fellowship with Him. To bear the cross proves to be the only way of triumphing over suffering. ...

Jesus prays to His Father that the cup may pass from Him, and His Father hears His prayer; for the cup of suffering will indeed pass from Him—but only by His drinking it.

God speaking to Luther: "Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend—it must transcend all comprehension. ... Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge. My comprehension transcends yours. Thus Abraham went forth from His father... not knowing whither he went. ... Behold, that is the way of the cross. You cannot find it yourself, so you must let me lead you as though you were a blind man. Wherefore it is not you, no man... but I myself, who instruct you by my Word and Spirit in the way you should go. Not the work which you choose, not the suffering you devise, but the road which is clean contrary to all you choose or contrive or desire—that is the road you must take. To that I call you and in that you must be my disciple." 103-4

## **DISCIPLESHIP AND THE INDIVIDUAL**

"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. (Luke 14:26)

**Through the call of God, men become individuals... Every man is called separately, and must follow alone.** But men are frightened of solitude, and try to protect themselves from it by merging themselves in the society of their fellow-men and in their material environment. They become suddenly aware of their responsibilities and duties, and are loath to part with them. But all this is only a cloak to protect them from having to make a decision. They are unwilling to stand alone before Jesus and to be compelled to decide with their eyes fixed on Him alone.... It is Christ's will that he should be thus isolated, and that he should fix his eyes solely upon him. 105

### **BONHOEFFER'S POEM "WHO AM I?" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Who am I? They often tell me  
I would step from my cell's confinement  
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,  
like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They also tell me  
I would talk to my warders  
freely and friendly and clearly,  
as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me  
I would bear the days of misfortune  
equably, smilingly, proudly,  
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?  
Or am I only what I myself know of myself,  
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,  
yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,

trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,  
tossing in expectation of great events,  
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,  
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?

Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?

Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?

Or is something within me still like a beaten army,  
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.