

SERIES: The Mission – Joining God in His Work

“We Die with Christ” – Luke 14:25-33

INTRODUCTION

How often do people think about death? Or, how often should people think about death? The answer to those questions can change based on your perspective.

When you think about it from a personal point of view, death is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. All people die, of course, but we only experience death once – and only at the very end of our lives. Therefore, many people rarely think about death. It seems so far off.

When you think about these questions from a global point of view, however, death may seem very near. After all, more than 150,000 people die every day around the world – and more than 50 million people die each year. So, it may also be natural for people to think about death all the time.

Strangely enough, it makes sense for disciples of Jesus to think about death more than others in the world. That's because death is exactly what it costs to follow Christ. This cost typically does not include physical death in Western society – although even today there are many martyrs for the cause of Christ around the world.

Instead, the cost of following Jesus involves death to self. We must lay down control of our lives in order to take up our crosses and follow Christ. We must sacrifice our own plans and priorities in order to follow and obey Him as our Lord. Our experience of dying to self is both a one-time phenomenon and an ongoing requirement.

KNOW THE STORY

Luke records in chapter 14 of his Gospel that large crowds were following Jesus seemingly for the wrong reasons. They had been amazed by His miracles – feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, casting out demons, and so on – but they weren't fully committed to His mission. That's when Jesus gave them something new to think about. Jesus said:

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, and even his own life – he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple...In the same way, every one of you who does not say good-bye to all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14: 26-27, 33

DEATH TO SELF IS NECESSARY

It seems to be human nature to react negatively when people demand us to do something. We naturally rebel or resist when given orders. Instead, we prefer a situation where our needs and desires are met first. Even then, we like to be asked nicely. If those conditions are met, and we're asked in a manner acceptable to us, we'll consider it.

This is not the way of Jesus. In fact, the only thing Jesus wants from us is everything. Notice Jesus' three uses of the word *cannot* in Luke 14:

- *“If anyone come to Me and does not hate his own father & mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, and even his own life – he **cannot** be My disciple.”* V. 26

This is a comparative phrase that basically means our love and devotion to Christ comes absolutely first and above any other human relationship. Our allegiance to Christ makes any other allegiance utterly insignificant.

- *“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me **cannot be My disciple.**”* V. 27. What does it mean to bear your own cross? Very simply it means that you must die to self. Jesus died on the cross for us, and in order to truly follow Him we must follow Him in that death. We must die to our desires, plans, and priorities.
- *“In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not say good-bye to all his possessions **cannot be My disciple.**”* V. 33 This is not a comparative analogy. This is not symbolism. When you follow Jesus, you own nothing and possess nothing – except Jesus. In order to follow Christ, you must be willing to die to self so that you can live for Him. This is the foundation for life as His disciple.

DEATH TO SELF BRINGS LIFE IN CHRIST

There are really two ways we experience death as followers of Jesus. The first is the death to our “old selves”:

“For through the law I have died to the law, so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:19-20

This death is what we often refer to as salvation. It’s a one-time event through which we become a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). The old is gone, and the new has come. Not surprisingly, this form of dying is the easier of the two.

The second way we experience death as followers of Jesus is through the process of dying to self. And *process* is an important word because – unlike the experience of being born again as a new creation – dying to self is not a one-time event. As we’ve already seen, it’s a life-long journey that involves letting go of our plans, priorities, and possessions. To put it another way, dying to self is the daily discipline of releasing control of our lives and submitting to the control of Christ.

In an average lifetime, the average American spends 3 years in business meetings, 13 years watching TV, Spends \$89,281 on food, consumes 109,354 pounds of food, Makes 1811 trips to McDonalds, Spends \$6881 in vending machines, Eats 35,138 cookies and 1483 pounds of candy, Catches 304 colds, Is involved in 6 motor vehicle accidents, is hospitalized 8 times (men) or 12 times (women), Spends 24 years sleeping.

In a strange twist, our experiences with death as followers of Jesus aren’t negative or morbid in any way. In fact, dying with Christ and daily dying to ourselves are key landmarks on the pathway toward new life.

In some ways, the concept of “dying to self” is an abstract one. We don’t typically wake up in the morning and say: “I’m going to work on dying to self throughout the day. I’ll start right after breakfast.” Instead we participate in the process of dying to self through several personal disciplines that help us relinquish control of our schedules, our resources, our priorities, and so on.

Prayer - Reading God’s Word - Fasting - Journaling - Solitude - Keeping the Sabbath - Tithing