

This Week's Theme: What is it Going to Cost Me?

This Week's Memory Verse: *In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33*

Monday, June 2

Scripture Reading: Genesis 22:1-19

Abraham was 75 when God came to him and said he would be the father of a great nation – the patriarch of God's chosen people. One problem: Abraham had no children and his wife was barren (and 66!). But God promised Abraham, and Abraham trusted God.

And Abraham waited . . . and waited . . . and waited . . . for 24 years.

You know the story: At the youthful age of 99 and 90 respectively, Abraham and Sarah gave birth to a bouncing baby boy they named Issac. God had come through and kept His promise. So, why would God come to Abraham and ask him to sacrifice "your only son, Issac, whom you love?" Remember, this isn't just his only son: it's the only provision for the promised holy nation. Sacrifice Issac? Why?

To test Abraham. To see how valuable his faith was to him. To see what his faith might cost him. God had never asked for a human sacrifice before (or since!); Issac was never in danger. But God needed to see the value of the faith of his chosen patriarch. He needed to know what example he would set. When God's people talked about the father of their nation years later, what would they say about Abraham?

God found out. They would say he was a man of incredible faith. And how would they know? Because Abraham was willing to pay a high price to obey God. He showed the value of his faith to every generation that would follow. Abraham trusted God.

What about you? What example are you setting? What will they say about your faith? On what evidence will they base their judgment? Abraham's actions said he trusted God no matter what. What do your actions say?

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Tuesday, June 3

Scripture Reading: Judges 6-7

Gideon is one of the more unsuspecting OT heroes. There he was, hiding out in a wine press, when God came to him, labeling Gideon a mighty warrior. Gideon was hard to convince, but after God answered all of his questions (and tests), Gideon decided it must be a God-thing.

So, how cruel must it have felt to Gideon when, upon assembling an army of 32,000 men, God whittled it down to 300. 300! To take on an army whose camels "could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore." Worse yet, this army of 300 was armed with trumpets. Empty jars, and torches. Not exactly the arsenal great victories are made of. Still, a little goes a long way in the hands of God, and Israel won an amazing victory that day without lifting a sword.

I like Gideon because he was a reluctant follower (I can relate to that), but a follower just the same. His faith and trust and obedience cost him what he thought he needed most: manpower for his army. God told Gideon, "You don't need 32,000; you need 300." And Gideon went along. His faith cost him what he thought he needed, but his faith was rewarded.

We spend most of our lives accumulating what we think we need. And many times what we think we need is exactly what we need. But we must remember that, ultimately, all we need is God. Sometimes we become too dependent on people or things, even good things. Sometimes we are distracted by the object of need, or the process of accumulation. Sometimes what we need becomes an idol – it takes the place of God.

Trust me, God takes His place in your life quite seriously. There is no question that the pursuit of God will cost you something, and I can almost guarantee it will cost you something you think you need; something you have begun to put your faith in; something that needs to be removed so God alone might receive the glory He alone deserves. Sometimes God might leave you with nothing but Him (and maybe a handful of underwhelming resources) so you can discover (or re-discover) that He is all you need.

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Wednesday, June 4

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 1

Hannah wanted a child more than anything. In spite of all her husband's efforts to enrich her life, she wanted a baby. She wanted one so badly that she went to Eli, the priest, and poured out her grief and anguish over being childless to the Lord. Eli was touched by her persistent passion, and prayed that God would grant her request. And God did. Soon, little Samuel was born and was his mother's pride and joy.

So, how odd does it seem to you that Hannah would finally give birth to a baby boy, only to turn around and give him away? As soon as Samuel was weaned, Hannah took him back to Eli to be raised as a priest. God answered Hannah's faith by giving her a son, and her faith that brought her a son soon cost her that son. I know "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," but isn't this a bit extreme?

I don't think so. It really makes sense, when you think about it, that we should be willing to give to God the very rewards he bestows when we exercise our faith. Hannah wasn't a woman of selective faith. She was a woman of faith. The faith that led her to God with a heavy heart was the faith that led her back to God with a grateful heart. She knew the baby was God's, and she literally did what I pray all Christian parents do: she committed her children to God.

Will your faith cost you your children? Maybe – just ask the parents of missionaries. But it will definitely cost you a selfish response to the blessings of God. God blesses us because He loves us, but with every gift God gives is a divine desire those gifts will be used for His glory. Our faith might cost us anything or everything, but it will never cost God His glory. The glory of God is never a causality of faith; it is the result of faith. God rewards our faith, and we reward Him with more faith.

*I prayed for this child and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. **So now I give him back to the Lord.***

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Thursday, June 5

Scripture Reading: 1 Chronicles 29:1-20

David wanted to accomplish one thing before he died; he wanted to build the Temple. In today's text, David has reached the end of his life, and though he didn't get to build the Temple, he did get to make a hefty contribution so his son, Solomon, could make his dream a reality.

Take a look at what it cost David: gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx, turquoise, fine stone and marble, plus all his personal treasures of gold and silver (which were considerable as king of the most powerful nation of the time). Others followed suit and gave generously, and (are you ready for this?), they were happy about it: *The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.*

Have you noticed we don't mind how much something cost when that something is important or of great value? David and the people didn't complain about what it cost them to build the temple because they wanted to be a part of the work of God. They understood the only reason they could give to the Temple project was because God had given so generously to them in the first place. David prayed in verse 16: *O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a Temple in your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.*

It doesn't really cost us anything when we give back to God, because it's all His anyway. And, if faith is going to cost you, make sure you pay the price on something that really matters – on joining God in His work.

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Friday, June 6

Scripture Reading: John 5:1-15

Thirty-eight years. Thirty eight years this man was seeking to be healed. And Jesus, in His grace, healed him.

Can you imagine what that must have been like? The only life he likely had ever known was changed forever by one question ("Do you want to be healed?") and two commands ("Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."). Now he could walk. Now he could work. Now he could have a life and a future.

Jesus gave him a life and a future. A gift of grace. A gift of love. And no strings attached, right? Well . . .

Jesus made one stipulation: stop sinning. *Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.* Was Jesus suggesting sin was related to his illness? I suppose that is a possibility, but I think Jesus was stating a simple, profound truth. When you encounter Jesus, it will cost you: it will cost you your life of sin.

There is no room for sinfulness and holiness. There is no room for the things of the world and the things of God. If you are going to follow Jesus, it will cost you sinful choices and sinful actions. Paul put it like this: *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is. Set your mind on things above, not earthly things, for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things. (Colossians 3:1-3, 5, 7)*

Who would have thought healing from 38 years of being an invalid would be the easy part? It is only the starting place. When Jesus comes there is grace, and healing . . . and responsibility. Grace is free, but it's not cheap. It will cost you a life of sin. Is that too much to pay? Your answer makes all the difference in the world.

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Saturday, June 7

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:32-5:11

It is one thing to cheat someone. It is another thing to try and cover it up (can you say, "Watergate?"). But it is a whole different thing all together when the one you are trying to cheat and cover-up from is God. That is exactly what Ananias and Sapphira were up to.

This always seems like a harsh passage – namely because it is – but it makes an impacting point. Ananias and Sapphira were not in trouble for holding back some of the money from the sale of their property. They were in trouble for passing it off as the full sale of the price. They no doubt saw the blessing and adulation Barnabas received and wanted the same for themselves without paying the price Barnabas did. At the root of their sin was the love of money and the love of praise.

Maybe the love of money and praise is not at the root of our dealings with God, but often we are looking for an easy way – a cheaper price to pay – to get desired results. This passage reminds us there is no such easy way. To be an obedient follower of Jesus, it will cost you.

OK, the point is well-made, but, still, these folks got struck down. Does the punishment fit the crime? In his commentary on Acts, Curtis Vaughan writes, *"We should bear in mind the nature of their sin (against the Holy Spirit), the newness of the Christian movement, and the imperative need for integrity if the work was to gain acceptance by the populace. Stifler comments that the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was of the same character and for the same purpose as that meted out to Nahab and Abihu. 'God would teach that nothing unhallowed can be admitted in the service of his house' (p.44). We should note, in addition, the gravity of all sins – even our so-called 'little sins.'"**

This passage is a stark reminder: there is a cost to follow Jesus, and a greater cost not to follow Him, and an even greater cost to not follow and pretend like you are.

*Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 38.

Sunday, June 1

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised.

Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

"Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."

One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."

Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

"Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

"Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."

When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say. Luke 11:37-54