

# Something to Pray About

By Cindy Sears – June 2010

***“THE COST”***

## Sermon 1

(From my lay speaker training in April. What has God wrought?)

**Scripture: Luke 18: 18-30. See also: Matthew 19: 16-30; Mark 10: 17-31.**

Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’” And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!...” —Luke 18:18-24(NKJV)



Salvation is a gift from God, but there is a cost to discipleship, to obedience to God. Look to the life of Jesus, our Lord. He went to the cross in obedience to the Father. He gave up His place in Heaven at the right hand of God the Father to be born in a stable as a helpless baby, totally dependent on Mary and Joseph for food, shelter and clothing. He led around a bunch of young men, trying to instill the truth of God’s word in them for three years; and when He needed them the most, they deserted Him and denied knowing Him at all. Then Jesus was bound, spit upon, pummeled, whipped, mocked, stripped, and hung on a cross—the most excruciating way to die known in the world at that time, and also the most humiliating. In the end, Jesus rose triumphantly from the grave, but the path to that triumph was long and difficult.

In the story of the rich ruler, we like to believe that Jesus really didn’t mean for the young man to sell everything to follow Him. Surely, it was only a test to determine how committed the man was to doing all that was necessary to inherit eternal life. After all, we know that we cannot earn or buy eternal life. It is a gift from God. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8 NRSV) It is only by God’s mercy through Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection that we can be justified and be given the gift of eternal life. We also live under grace. There are no works we need do to be saved. We don’t have to be baptized or baptized a certain way. We don’t have to be a member of one specific denomination. We don’t have to serve as missionaries in a foreign country for one year. We don’t have to pray five times a day in the direction of Jerusalem or anywhere else. We don’t have to dress a specific way, or live in a certain place, or eat special foods. We don’t have to possess strange knowledge or study for years under a master teacher to become Christians. *Sola gratia*, by grace alone, is the only way to be saved. “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” (Acts 16:31, NIV) “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, NIV)

But what does it mean to *believe* in Christ? Is this just an intellectual acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God, that He died for me, and that I’ve been forgiven and washed clean? Do I simply file this information in my mind somewhere, and just take it out once-in-awhile to show people that I have the ticket to heaven? Acquiring a bus or train ticket, doesn’t change you into a different person. But in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV), we read “if anyone is in Christ, there is a *new creation*: everything old has passed away; see, *everything has become new!*” And when Jesus talks about how He expects His followers to behave, He includes good works as a sign that the people are His true

disciples. In John 15, where Jesus compares Himself to the true vine, He says that those who are true to Him will bear much fruit. Jesus also says in John 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me..." And immediately after the Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:9 that we are not saved by works, he goes on to say in verse 10 that we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Even Jesus says in Matthew 16:27 that when He returns in His Father's glory that "he will reward each person according to what he has done."

In Luke 14:25-27, Jesus sets the cost of discipleship upon a high level. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Jesus then talks about how one should estimate the cost of an action before taking it. Have we underestimated what discipleship costs? Do we really think that the God/Man who gave up His seat on God's throne and came to earth to die would consider our comfortable brand of discipleship acceptable? Most of us who profess to be Christians do not even tithe? Many don't give anything to God's work here on earth. We spend our money on more important things: nice cars, big houses, the latest clothing styles, the newest electronic gadget, tickets to ballgames, fast food. And we spend large amounts of time watching TV shows and movies that we would not be watching if Jesus Christ or even our pastor walked into the room. The same is true of many of the books and magazines we read. And meanwhile, our Bibles gather dust and Satan gathers more residents for Hell. And we Christians look just like our neighbors who have no knowledge of God or Jesus at all. As Jesus said in Luke 14:34-35, "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out."

The rich ruler went away sad, because he had great wealth. Most of us do not have great wealth, yet we live as if what we do have is way more valuable than what Christ did for us on the cross. But is it? How much of a reward will you receive when Christ returns? Will you receive any reward at all, or will you be one of those cast out, because your inaction, your unfruitfulness proved that you were never one of Christ's own to begin with? As Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

I ask, I beseech you to examine your heart—and your life, which shows you what is truly in your heart—and determine who rules you—the Lord Jesus or your own selfish desires? Christ wants to be our Lord, as well as our Savior. He must be both; He will not settle for less. To believe means to trust and to follow—and following is costly—in time, money, and effort; yet the rewards are exceedingly better than anything and everything we could gain in this world. Store up your treasures in heaven, take up your cross daily, and follow Jesus into true discipleship, and you will be rewarded. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29, NIV) Amen.