

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for September 27: The results of knowing Jesus

September 14, 2009

The preacher made a plain case and interesting offer. He proclaimed that if any person would follow his advice and become a Christian that person would experience material advance and good health. Whatever the person desired would come as a result of becoming a Christian and contributing to the preacher's ministry.

Jesus never gave such an invitation. Jesus called disciples to follow him into service, suffering and death. Jesus outlined a strenuous path for those who choose to follow him. Accepting Christ as Savior involves denying self, serving others and accepting suffering.

Denying self (Mark 8:34-38)

Jesus desires to become the eternal Savior for every person. He calls on everyone to repent of his/her sins and trust in his loving sacrifice on the cross for eternal life. His love reaches out to every person in every land and among every people group. Jesus' appeal to people to follow him, however, does not rest on false promises. Jesus promises a life of spiritual abundance and blessings through true discipleship that comes at a great price but gives immense rewards.

Jesus had performed a second miracle of feeding a multitude, healed a blind man at Bethsaida and heard Peter's confession of his messiahship. When the Master predicted his death, Peter rebuked him for such a suggestion. Jesus told Peter to stop trying to turn him from the cross. Jesus invited the people to follow him into the strenuous life of discipleship

and laid out the path for discipleship in his kingdom.

Jesus called upon the people in the crowd along with the 12 disciples to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him. Denying self does not mean to do without some material matter, to practice asceticism, reject self or hate self. Self-denial means to renounce self as the dominant or central element of life. It means replacing self with God-in-Christ as the object of love. It means placing God's will ahead of self-will. It means a willingness to suffer for Jesus and for others. The crowds were following because of the miracles and the food. Jesus calls for discipleship based on love for Jesus and for the gospel (v. 35).

Those who deny self, take up their crosses and follow Jesus will avoid losing life, that is wasting life and missing the great opportunities living for God provides. Those who follow Jesus save their lives by becoming more Christ-like and sharing in Christ's kingdom. Any who due to fear deny Christ will lose this precious life. Jesus used the term "Son of Man" to indicate he was claiming to be Messiah.

One result of salvation is the invitation from Jesus to deny self, take up the cross and follow him.

Serving others (Mark 9:33-37)

Human nature and American culture tends to lead us toward the desire for first place, preeminent position and ultimate fame. Humans strive for greatness.

As Jesus and his disciples continued their journey toward Jerusalem and his cross, the disciples began to argue or debate over which one would be the greatest. Arriving in Capernaum, Jesus addressed their discussion of greatness. Jesus explained that the person who desired to be first would actually move to last. Greatness in the kingdom consists of serving others, not of being served by others. Personal devotion to Christ leads to the

practical duty of loving service to others.

The path to true greatness lies in selfless service to others. To cement this teaching, Jesus turned to a demonstration by taking a child into his arms. The Aramaic word for child is also the word for servant. The child was a symbol of innocence, humility, helplessness and vulnerability. To “welcome” or “receive” one means to be concerned about, to care for or to show kindness to. Greatness in the kingdom consists not of position but of humility and service to those who most need care and attention. The results of following Jesus include serving others as Jesus would do.

Accepting suffering (Mark 10:32-34)

As the journey to Jerusalem continued, Jesus was approached by a young man asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. The answer was again the process of denying self and following Jesus without reserve. Jesus used the young man’s failure to follow him as a teaching moment to show earthly riches could be barriers for accepting his invitation to genuine life (Mark 10:17-31).

Jesus at this point gave his third prediction of his death. The people were astonished by Jesus’ warning of the danger of riches and rejection of his invitation. Jesus described the events he faced in Jerusalem—the betrayal, the flogging and the death on the cross. He also promised the resurrection.

Tragically, the disciples failed to understand Jesus was teaching his followers must be willing to accept the possibility of suffering. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, took this opportunity to request first places in the kingdom (Mark 10:35-44). Their request, promptly denied, showed they understood little of kingdom living. The sons of Zebedee followed the ways of the world, seeking authority and position. Jesus demonstrated the new way, that of service of others. Christ-likeness involves accepting the possibility and the way of suffering for others. Suffering to benefit others

remains one of the most important results of following Jesus.