



The Costly Call

Is There a Cost to Following Jesus?

Suffering hurts. But when the follower of Jesus Christ goes through suffering, there's a valuable purpose to the pain. The Bible describes it as going through a refining process—like that of gold and silver in a 2000°F oven! The refining of our faith happens when we rely on Jesus in complete surrender and trust him at the peak of our suffering. So, rather than react with surprise or despair if God chooses us to go through the fire, we are sustained by focusing on the sure, joyful and triumphant outcome. As we read in Zechariah 13:9, “And I will put this third, [God’s set-apart people], into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

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DAY 1: THE MAKING AND CALLING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

In the calling of the first followers of Jesus, the apostles Peter, Andrew, James and John all left their family fishing businesses on the spot. With that one miraculous great catch of fish after a night of empty nets, “they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed [Jesus].” (Read the story in Luke 5:1-11.)

How about Paul, who abandoned his impressive credentials and long list of accomplishments? With a dramatic conversion story, Paul, the former ravager of the Church, became so impassioned for Jesus that the Jews plotted to kill him too. (Read the story in Acts 9:1-31.)

Read: Matthew 8:18-22

GOING DEEPER

Jesus’ call to each of the apostles was always preceded by an experience of His very presence. And Jesus was not one to beat around the bush, trying to convince a person with lengthy explanations why they should accept His offer. He simply said, “From now on you will be catching men” after the men went on a successful fishing expedition with Him (Luke 5:10). To Paul—then known as Saul—Jesus asked, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” when Saul was looking for His disciples to kill them.

Some of us may have dramatic conversion stories like Paul. Some of us may have simply fallen on our knees and asked for forgiveness of our sins when we heard God’s offer of salvation, much like Peter did. What matters is that you received the truth: “Jesus is the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6), and surrendered to Jesus.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What relationship, possession, accomplishment, or employment have you given up because you took a stand for your faith in Jesus Christ?

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DAY 2: TRIAL BY FIRE

Caleb Parke writes of a Yazidi Christian in Iraq who was “burned alive three times by ISIS after they found out he was a follower of Christ. He said his body ‘didn’t burn’ a single time when he was imprisoned and tortured by the radical Islamic terrorists for two months.”¹

In the book of Daniel, three young men named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a blazing furnace after they refused to worship an image of gold set up by King Nebuchadnezzar. But much to the surprise of everyone watching this very public show, the three came out unharmed. Not even the smell of fire could be detected!

Read: Daniel 3:8-25

GOING DEEPER

There will very likely come a time in your life when you will have to choose the ways of God over the ways of man. The book of Mark tells about Jesus traveling into Jerusalem at the beginning of the Passover celebration. Entering the Temple, He started cleaning up the corruption of moneychangers and the salespeople he found in the outer Temple court, saying, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves” (Mark 11:17).

The religious leaders, who set up the structure of corruption, felt challenged by Jesus’ action and were angered. Asking Jesus on whose authority He did what He did, He turned the table around and asked, “Did John’s authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human? Answer me!” (Mark 11:29).

Challenge to leadership. Ignorance or defiance to God’s Truth. What happens when these two collide? Leaders who operate in the worldly realm and practice ungodliness will often hide behind social issues and the law. But rage or a hateful scheme toward the child of God will ultimately never prevail. Psalm 118:6-7 remind us, “The LORD is for me, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me? Yes, the LORD is for me; he will help me. I will look in triumph at those who hate me.”

PERSONAL REFLECTION

In what ways do you personally stand up to the world’s constant bombardment of godly values and speak God’s truth despite your possible cancellation because of your faith in Jesus?

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DAY 3: IMPRISONED FOR CHRIST

Hao Zhiwei is an Egangqiao Church pastor in China. She was arrested in July 2019 and is serving an eight-year sentence for “preaching the Gospel and collecting offerings,” according to Churchleaders.com. Writing to her son, she encouraged him of God’s faithfulness in watching over him and his brother.²

Both Peter and Paul, Jesus’ apostles, were no strangers to imprisonment. Both spoke to many of the truth of Jesus’ death and resurrection as well as repentance of sin. They were considered a threat to the religious leaders of their times. But instead of fear for their own lives, they experienced a humble dependence on God and continued worship of Him liberated them.

Read: Acts 4:1-22; 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

GOING DEEPER

In the book of John, Jesus reminded His followers that the world would never have a place for Him and His followers. In chapter 15, Jesus spoke of the world’s hatred, saying, “Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me” (read John 15:18-25).

But Jesus continued to boldly task his followers to “preach the Gospel to the ends of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20). Amidst this expected persecution, Paul proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah and explained the fulfillment of prophecies through Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. Peter, on the other hand, talked of repentance and judgment. The message of Jesus will never make sense to a sin-filled world.

Are you standing up for God and your faith in Jesus? May you be emboldened by these words in the book of Daniel: “Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever” (12:3).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

How are you encouraged by our brothers and sisters in Christ, who, despite their government’s prohibitions against Christianity, risk their lives and open themselves up to persecution?

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DAY 4: STONED TO DEATH

The world was shocked to hear of the death of Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a university student in Sokoto, Nigeria. Yakubu thanked Jesus for help in her exam and caused outrage among some of her Muslim classmates. This led to them calling her blasphemous and, eventually, being stoned, beaten and burned to death.⁴

Deborah's courage reminds us of Stephen in the book of Acts. Steven, who was known as "a man full of God's grace and power," was called blasphemous when he spoke of Moses and God. The angered religious leaders "dragged him out of the city and began to stone him...While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep" (6:8-7:60).

Stephen knew that Jesus had submitted to His Father's will, even to death. With the same words Jesus spoke, Stephen followed his Savior's example by forgiving his murderers. As Stephen died, he asked Jesus to welcome him to paradise—what an amazing picture of sweet remembrance of his imminent, joyful reunion with Jesus!

Read: Luke 22-23; Acts 6:8-7:60

GOING DEEPER

Jesus was no stranger to being mocked and accused of being a criminal. When He was being tried for "calling himself the Messiah" and found not guilty to receive the death penalty, the crowd still wanted blood...His death. Even while Jesus was hanging on a cross, He was ridiculed by the crowd who chanted, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One" (Luke 23:35).

The world will always use labels like "blasphemous" or "hateful" in response to those whose values they don't share and that convict them. Labels result in anger and hatred that lead to acts of violence. Jesus still says, "But take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

How would you describe religious freedom where you live and what issues do followers of Jesus encounter?

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DAY 5: FOLLOWING JESUS, LOOKING FORWARD

In 1956, the world was transfixed by the death of the five American missionaries, who were speared to death by Huaorani tribesmen (then known as Auca) in the Ecuadorian jungle. No one had contacted this notoriously violent tribe until then. These men all knew the danger of their mission: reaching the unreached with the Gospel. What they set out to do, others followed to fulfillment, proving that to give up one's life for Jesus is never in vain.⁴

"Heaven isn't here, it's there," writer Elisabeth Elliott used to say. No, this world is not our home. The follower of Jesus is always meant for more than the here and now, for more than our limited life on this earth. Elisabeth would know! She was the wife of Jim Elliott, one of the men who died at the hands of the Huaoranis. Jim once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Read: John 15:1-17

GOING DEEPER

"Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it to eternity," Scripture says (John 12:25). Following Jesus requires your all and giving your all can mean living a life on earth that includes suffering. But Jesus sees you in your suffering. In fact, Scripture says, "You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book" (Psalm 56:8b).

Remember, your suffering indicates your standing as God's child. "And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering" (Romans 8:17). Through your identification with Jesus in suffering, you will actually share in the Glory of God! This is hard to even conceptualize but we know it's more wonderful than anything we have ever experienced in this life.

Finally, your suffering has an end point. The book of Revelation declares, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (21:4).

Until the day we rest in worship at the throne of God, may we always look to Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Is God speaking to you about your commitment to Him today? What do you look forward to as you choose to identify with and, possibly, suffer for Jesus?

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¹ Iraqi Christian survives being burned alive by ISIS 3 times: '[Jesus] spoke to me' | Fox News, accessed 6-19-22.

² Chinese Pastor Jailed 8 Years for Preaching the Gospel Writes 'God Is Faithful' in Letter to Son (churchleaders.com), accessed 6-19-22

³ Deborah Yakubu: Killing in the name of God (vanguardngr.com), accessed 6-19-22

⁴ Who Were the Five Missionaries Who Died in the Ecuador Jungle? (christianity.com), accessed 6-19-22