

It Is Written

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The Soldiers and the Cross

By Jordan Shouse

The Roman soldiers were professionals in execution. Like thousands before and after Jesus, they marched the Son of God to “the place of the Skull” where He was to suffer a vicious, embarrassing death. The Roman soldiers were instruments of cruelty and pain. It was the Roman soldiers who scourged Jesus (Matthew 27:26). It was the Roman soldiers who put the robe on His back, who fashioned the crown of thorns and beat it into His skull (Matthew 27:28-31). They mocked Him as the “King of the Jews.” They spat upon Him. They treated Jesus like one of their low-life victims.

When we look to the Roman soldiers at the scene of the cross, we see two very different pictures.

On one hand you see the soldiers gambling for Jesus’ possessions. According to tradition, the guards were given the possessions of the condemned. You might expect the spoils to be few from a man who confessed that “foxes have holes, the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head” (Luke 9:58). No money. No jewelry. No matter. These soldiers will gladly gamble for whatever bounty this crucified King may have (John 19:23-24). Like Caiaphas before them, they are unknowingly playing their role in the fulfillment of prophecy (John 11:49).

In looking at the gambling soldiers, you have to wonder how many today are following in their footsteps? “What’s in it for me?” has become our national cliché. Much of modern religion seems to be built upon the creed that we are happy to be Christians provided the Provider provides. We put some cheap prices on the love of God and the blood of Jesus when we play games at the foot of the cross. “If God loved me...I wouldn’t be sick...I’d have a job...I’d have more money...my family would be happy...and seeing this, the Savior must cry.

How could they? But how can we be so close to the blood of Christ and yet be so preoccupied with our selfish interests? May it never be said of us what one author wrote of these gambling soldiers: “So close to the timber, yet so far from the blood. So close to the cross, but so far from the Christ.”

On the other hand there’s the Centurion’s confession. On a normal day he would be commanding a hundred of Rome’s finest fighting men. On this day he is supervising a four-man death squad. No doubt he had seen men die. He had heard their despair as pain overtook their resolve. He had heard them curse their executioners, their father and mother, and the day they were born. No doubt he had heard them curse God.

But on this day he heard the Son of God. He heard the Savior offer forgiveness to the mob, and hope to a thief. He heard the cry of victory and the prayer of faith. Had the Centurion seen Jesus raise the dead, walk on

water, or give sight to the blind? I don’t know. But he saw Jesus die. He heard the Victor’s cry. He felt the earth quake and stood in awe of the blackness that replaced the noon-day sun. For the Centurion, the evidence was overwhelming and the conclusion was obvious: “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Of all the things in God’s creation, it is the cross that cannot be ignored. The cross which exposes the enormity of our sin also demonstrates the depth of God’s love for man.

Two groups of soldiers. One was focused on self-gain and possessions, the other on the Lord who was slain.

What do you see when you gaze at the old rugged cross?

No Discounts On Discipleship

By Ken Weliever

We love a good deal.

We wait for sales. Browse garage sales. Scroll online for discounts. From the chaos of Black Friday to after-Christmas markdowns and tax-free weekends, we're wired to get the most for the least. That's the bargain-hunter mindset.

Unfortunately, that same mentality sometimes surfaces in spiritual matters. Some folks want to receive as much as they can while giving as little as they can get by with. But God is not in the business of offering discounts on discipleship.

Salvation is free to us—but it was infinitely costly to Him. It required the greatest sacrifice ever made: Jesus' death on the cross. In turn, He calls for our commitment, consecration, and sacrifice. In a shocking and striking passage, Jesus speaks to the cost of discipleship:

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:26–27).

These words sound startling. Hate your parents? Your spouse? Your family? That doesn't sound like Jesus.

But in the language of His day, strong contrasts were often used to make a point. Jesus is not calling for hostility or animosity toward others. That would contradict the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) and the many New Testament teachings about love within the family.

Rather, Jesus is demanding supreme loyalty. Our love for Him must be so deep, so strong, that by comparison every other relationship—even the closest family ties—pales in significance. Even our own life must come second.

The context makes this even clearer. As Jesus left the Pharisees' house, great crowds followed Him. But He was not impressed by their numbers. Many likely followed out of curiosity. Some because He fed the hungry. Others are hoping to see a miracle. Still others longed for a political Messiah who would overthrow Rome.

Jesus was never interested in the size of the crowd, but in the depth of commitment.

Discipleship, He makes clear, is not for the faint of heart. Not for the casual Christian. Not for the spiritual bargain hunter. There is a price to be paid.

The word "disciple" is the most common Bible term for a follower of Christ, used over 270 times in the Gospels and Acts. It describes a learner—a student—one who is being shaped to become like the Master. And Jesus says that disciples must bear their cross. Not a self-inflicted burden of our own choosing—but the cross that comes with commitment. It means daily identification with Christ in surrender, sacrifice, and obedience to God's will. It means death to self—our plans, our ambitions, our desires—and a willingness to follow Him wherever He leads.

To further illustrate the cost of discipleship, Jesus tells two brief stories: one about a man building a tower, and another about a king going to war. In both cases, the message is clear—count the cost before you begin. Don't start what you're not willing to finish. Don't make a commitment you're not prepared to keep. Discipleship is not a half-hearted endeavor. It is not a convenient add-on to an already self-directed life. It is a complete reordering of priorities.

Christ is not interested in half-hearted, self-seeking, bargain-hunting followers who are unwilling to pay the full price. He calls for full surrender. Total allegiance. Complete devotion.

So the real question is not, "What will it cost me?" But rather, "Is He worth it?"

What about you?

Will you be His disciple?