



XI. What's in it for me?

Asking the question. Following Jesus ... what's the price and what are the perks? I must admit that spiritually speaking, that question makes me cringe a little. The particular question that I am referring to is *not* about salvation. It is *not* about why someone should come to Jesus. But rather, it is about why should a believer follow Him without reservation ... why he or she should make the after-salvation second-decision commitment to be a Romans 12:1 *living sacrifice* ... why one should pay the price to be a disciple and not settle for being just a believer. An investment-type man or woman, maybe a venture capitalist, could analyze this second decision on a risk and reward basis. One could ask, *What's in it for me?* That can be an appropriate question because Jesus instructed us to sit down and count the cost of being His disciple, Luke 14:25-35.

Personal peace and affluence. Many Christians today, as Francis Schaeffer foretold in his 1976 *How Shall We Then Live*, have embraced the twin values of “personal peace and affluence”. *Personal peace* means being left alone, undisturbed, and tribulation-free so that I can, via ever increasing *affluence*, enjoy a life of more and more material things ... having my own territory and my own toys. Therefore, when we read John 10:10, we could be tempted to overlay those two impoverished values on these words of Jesus, “*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*” We could read into those words that He came to give us ever-increasing personal peace and affluence. But that is not what He said. Although it applies, I am not referring to the prosperity gospel movement ... the pyramid seed-scheme of the false teaching that if you make the pastor wealthy, God will make you wealthy. On the contrary, I am writing about the misguided belief in evangelical Christianity that Jesus came to give us personal peace and affluence. Since that is not what He meant, we should ask, *What is this abundant life He gives?*

An accurate paraphrase of John 10:10. Amplified by a variety of definitions of the Greek word translated as “*abundantly*” in that verse, it could read *I came that they may have life ... a supreme life, an exceeding life, a superior life, an extraordinary life, an uncommon life, a remarkable life, a life beyond measure.* A life so defined is not simply one of personal peace and affluence. So what did Jesus mean by an abundant life? What are the rewards and what is the price for such a life? Please don't think like a Westerner. Consider that some serious believers, after they have become serious, have gone through consequential severe times. Are such sufferings and tribulations the perks or the price ... or both? Is there more to it?

Let's start with the perks. What are some of the positives to being a second-decision disciple rather than a just a believer who has settled for only fire and life insurance? Jesus said, “*Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in*

the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life,” Mark 10:29-30. In these words, He promised that we will be rewarded for such sacrifice ... and that the rewards will be in this lifetime. But did you notice the phrase *along with persecutions*? Tribulations will come. However, if you let endurance work its work, you will become mature and complete. *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing,”* James 1:2-4. That last phrase, *lacking in nothing*, does not refer to personal peace and affluence. It refers to a complete, mature life in the center of God’s will ... an exceptional life that makes a difference here and for eternity. Another perk comes at the judgement of believers at what is referred to as the *Bema Seat* from the Greek in 2 Corinthians 5:10. That is a rewards judgement ... not a sin judgement, John 5:24 & Romans 8:1. It is clearly described in, *“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire,”* 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. So what is in it for me? The answer is ... blessings here and rewards in Heaven!

A disciple or just a believer? There are many reasons to be a disciple and not just a believer. Jesus said that we must continue in, abide in, His Word to truly be His disciples, John 8:31. A life rooted in the Word makes us: approved of God, 2 Timothy 2:15 ... purified, Psalm 119:9,11 ... re-proved, corrected, and trained, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ... guided in life, Psalm 119:105 ... given wisdom and understanding, Psalm 119:98-100, 130 ... comforted and revived, Psalm 119:50,71 ... given hope, Romans 15:4 ... given peace and sure-footedness, Psalm 119:165 ... given joy, Jeremiah 15:16 ... and generally blessed, Luke 11:28. Jesus said that the world will know that we are His disciples by our love for each other ... by our unconditional co-liability, John 13:35. There are two perks here. First our being in a band of disciples is a testimony of Christ to the world, John 17:11, 21-23. And second, there is strength in numbers for us. *“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart,”* Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. And a believer becomes a disciple, in part, by bringing others to faith in Christ. Jesus said, *“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be [in Greek ‘become’] My disciples,”* John 15:8. So what is in it for non-believers? They come to faith through disciples! And what is in it for God? He is glorified!

Taking His high road. There is another important reason to become a living-sacrifice disciple. The reason is that you are commanded to be one. *“Therefore I urge [exhort] you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present [the Greek verb here indicates that this is a one-time, once-for-all-time presentation of] your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship,”* Romans 12:1. Remember that you are not negotiating with God. He is the potter ... you are the clay, Isaiah 64:8. The clay has no legitimate agenda for the Potter. His agenda is for you to be a disciple rather than just a believer. The Matthew 28:18-20 Great Commission states as His goal for you to be a disciple and a disciplemaker. Submit to the Potter. Should the clay ask

the potter, *What's in it for me?* The better question to consider is, *What's in it for the Potter?* And please don't quarrel with the potter, Isaiah 45:9. His plan for you is far better than any plan you have for yourself. Trust Him and pay the price to follow Him. The price is high ... but it is all worth it. No one ever regrets doing life God's way. You will never regret taking His high road.

What is the high price for taking that road? It is putting Christ first above all ... above all relationships, above your own life, above all that you hold dear, Luke 14:25-35. That means putting Him above your personal peace and affluence ... above your territory and above your toys. Will you go through tribulation in paying that price? There are other sources of pain and suffering. But yes ... you will pay a price in seriously following Him. Moreover, you may need to reset your perspective on this because the Western world has a bad attitude toward suffering and tribulation. If we are squeezed into the world's mold, Romans 12:2, we want to eliminate all sources of trouble as quickly as possible and chemically dull any accompanying physical or emotional pain until the source of tribulation is gone. We might say, *no pain no gain* ... but we seldom embrace that in our spiritual lives. My basketball coach embraced the no-pain-no-gain philosophy and therefore we embraced it individually and as a team ... and we won the championship. Suffering goes with the territory of following Christ, "*For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,*" Philippians 1:29. And Jesus said, "*Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you,*" John 15:20. Let's not think like misguided Westerners. We need an eternal perspective. "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ... For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal,*" 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. Maybe we should ask, *Do we really want to win?* and *Will we pay the price to win?*

The call to all believers. The call to all of us is to present ourselves to God, once and for all time, as living, holy, and acceptable sacrifices. Jesus challenges us to be more than believers. He wants us to become His disciples and disciplinarians. He wants us to not only come to Him but also to follow after Him in obedience and sacrifice. Salvation is solely based on His sacrifice and His work. However, being a living-sacrifice disciple is additionally based on our sacrifice and our work. So my encouragement to each person who reads this is based on "*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong,*" 1 Corinthians 16:13. My encouragement is this, *Man up! Stand up and be counted as one in His band of disciples!*

It is a price worth giving ... because it is a life worth living!

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