

# BLOOD, BREAD AND FIRE

## The Christian's Threefold Experience

by

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### CHAPTER THREE

#### THREE PERILS OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

IN the last six verses of the ninth chapter of Luke, we have what might be called three gospel snapshots. Three incidents are related with two verses given to each incident. Three men suddenly appear, and then just as suddenly, they are gone. We never hear of them again, and the tantalizing brevity of it all leaves us wondering what became of them. But if they do not stay long before us, they stay long enough to illustrate three perils of Christian discipleship: the Peril of the Uncounted Cost, the Peril of the Unburied Corpse, and the Peril of the Unforsaken Circle.

It will be remembered that here we are dealing with discipleship, not salvation. There is a pleasant teaching going the rounds to the effect that all we need to do to be Christians is to catch the spirit of Jesus and come under the sway of His personality. But the natural man cannot follow Christ, and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. One might as well try to catch sunbeams with fishhooks as to try to lay hold of Christ with the faculties of unregenerated Adam.

We must be born again by the Holy Spirit through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our sin-bearer and Saviour. Then, having become sons of God through faith in the Son of God, we are next challenged to deny self, take up the cross, and follow our Lord. It is, therefore, to twice-born believers who have set out to follow in His steps that we present three perils of Christian discipleship.

I. *Consider, first, the Peril of the Uncounted Cost, as set forth in verses 57 and 58 of Luke 9:*  
**“And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said to him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”**

In the parallel account of Matthew, we read that this man was **“a certain scribe”** (Matthew 8: 19) and that throws much light on this matter.

Up until this time most of our Lord's disciples had been fishermen, humble folk of lowly occupation. If He had had an eye to earthly advantage, He would have lost no time enlisting a scribe among His followers. Would it not add prestige to number a theologian among them? Would it not add influence to have at least one D.D. among the disciples?

But with His usual perception, our Lord saw the tragic weakness in this man and answered him with the reminder that while foxes and birds had staying places, the Saviour Himself had nowhere to lay His head. It was only another way of saying: “You only think you want to follow Me. Do you realize what you are undertaking? Have you counted the cost?”

All through the Bible we have these quick-on-the-trigger enthusiasts who are fine self-starters but who bog up miserably on the middle mile. There was the mixed multitude that started out of Egypt with Moses, attracted by the display of God’s power and the glamour of adventure. It looked very romantic and exciting, but out in the wilderness they went to pieces, a perfect type of that superficial crowd that will ride any bandwagon that passes by.

We have in our churches plenty of professors who make good soldiers in a dress-parade when the flags are waving and the bugles are blowing but who, having never counted the cost, are offended when persecution arises and the battle waxes dangerous.

Of this sort were the Reubenites of Judges 5: 15-16, who had fine impulses and patriotic sentiments but stayed at home from the battle, at home in the quiet security of the sheepfolds. We have those in our churches who have plenty of sentiment but make no sacrifice; who sing lustily in the choir on Sunday but live lustfully in the world all week; the kind of people who, when a piano is to be moved, escape by carrying the bench! Such enthusiasts file down the aisles promising to follow Christ whithersoever He goes, but who, not having counted the cost, begin to build and are not able to finish.

Our Lord had to contend with these superficial disciples throughout His ministry. In John 2: 23-25 we read that many believed on His name when they saw the miracles He did, **“But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”**

Notice that they believed when they saw. That is not God’s way — believing, then seeing, so of course, the Lord could not endorse it. Our Lord had absolutely no confidence in human nature. We have been hearing a great deal lately about Christ’s going around seeing the latent good in people and calling out their best qualities. But Jesus Christ had no confidence in man; He had confidence only in what God can do for man.

Most of our commencement addresses are variations of the old “Go out and express yourself” idea. As a schoolboy I used to listen to inspiring and perspiring orators tell me that I had within me a hidden giant, an Atlas or a Hercules, who only needed to be released, latent possibilities that only needed to be set free. I discovered that there was a giant within me truly enough, but he was the devil, and he was already free! But I thank God that I also learned that there is a stronger Man who can bind the strong man so that I can say, **“He that is in me is greater than he that is in the world.”**

Our Lord had no confidence in superficial disciples who did not count the cost. Crowds did not deceive Him. We measure a minister by the size of his crowd, but in the sixth chapter of John the Lord Jesus preached a crowd away!

They could not bear His sermon on the bread of life and fell away until only the irreducible minimum of faithful disciples remained, and even they were puzzled. Again in Luke 14: 25-33, another multitude followed Him, but He knew they did not mean business, so He turned upon them with that terrific challenge to forsake everything, and with the two illustrations of not counting the cost: the foolish builder, and the king going to war. Sifting church-members through that sifter, one finds plenty of chaff today!

We have made discipleship too easy. We live in an age that wants something for nothing. Duty and discipline are out of date. We have forgotten that we are to endure hardness; that Ananias told Paul what things he must suffer, not what a fine salary lay ahead. Salvation has become a nightcap instead of a helmet. Ours is an air-conditioned, upholstered, streamlined faith. We go to heaven in Pullmans and stop over at Vanity Fair for the weekends. Instead of fleeing the City of Destruction, we are out to clean it up with a social gospel. Tunnels have been put through the Hill of Difficulty, and the dirt has been used to fill up the valley of Humiliation.

It is said that at the early church convention of Nice, of the three hundred and eighteen delegates there were not more than a dozen who did not bear upon their bodies the marks of suffering in Christ's name. A great deal of water has run under the bridge since those days. Cushions have supplanted crosses. Comfortable Christians sing, "Where He leads me, I will follow," but not having counted the cost, they begin what they are unable to finish. But we thank God that when we start in His strength, He who has begun a good work in us will perform it.

*II. Consider, in the second place, the Peril of the Unburied Corpse.*

**"And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury the dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God"** (Luke 9:59-60).

The first man was too eager; this man is not eager enough. The Lord Himself calls this man and adds a command to preach the gospel.

Now this man wanted to bury his father; why then did he receive such a stern reply? The trouble lies deep: he was the kind who was ready to follow after all the "ifs" and reservations and provisos had been attended to. There is also a word in his request that tells the tale: **"Suffer me first to go and bury my father."** Something else was ahead of Jesus, something more important than the kingdom.

In such case there is always something dead in the life that needs burying; there is a corpse somewhere but we are not to return for the funeral. Sometimes there are past memories. Some disciples never get anywhere because of living in the past, by the casket of the dead, in the graveyard of yesterday.

God said to Joshua, **"Moses my servant is dead: now therefore, arise!"** They had wept for thirty days over Moses, and that is long enough to weep over anybody. Life is too short to spend sitting up with the dead.

Maybe there is a friendship, a fellowship of this world that needs to be forsaken. If a man hate not the dearest one for Christ's sake, he cannot be a disciple. Many a young Christian gets nowhere in discipleship because of being in love with an unsaved sweet heart. **"She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth"** (I Timothy 5:6) and the young man who courts a pleasure-loving worldling had better remember that God calls her a corpse, however animated she may appear!

And how we preachers need afresh to hear our Lord's stern words: **"Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God!"**

We are forever running to this supper and that banquet, this committee-meeting and that convocation, pronouncing the invocation over this and the benediction over that, blessing a tombstone here and extolling a corpse yonder, just helping the dead bury their dead!

Whatever one's private interpretation of this verse, whether we hold that the Lord meant "Better the dead should be unburied," or "Let the dead in trespasses and sins bury the dead in trespasses and sins," our Lord certainly is saying: **"You must give up the dead loves of earth. I will have no divided allegiances, no fondling of the carcasses of this world."** We Christians must forsake the funeral parlors of this world, the corpses of old affections, if we are to follow Him Who is the resurrection and the life. There will always be plenty to assist in the funerals of earth without our help. His word to us is: **"What is that to thee: follow thou me!"**

III. *Consider, finally, the Peril of the Unforsaken Circle.*

**"And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"** (Luke 9:61-62).

This man went a step beyond the last man: saying, **"I will follow thee."** But he added a tragic word, and here is one of the saddest texts in the Bible: **"Lord, I will follow thee—but . . ."**

At first thought, one would say, "Surely there is no danger here. This man wants only to bid his people good-by." But again there is a tell-tale phrase: **"Them which are at home at my house."**

I know that sort—sedate, satisfied, smug, and settled, content to live in this world. I can hear them say to this man, "Now, don't get excited over this new preacher. This enthusiasm will soon blow over." And thus they would tone him down to the dreary lukewarmness of those who have never seen the heavenly vision. So our Lord abruptly heads off trouble with that stern pronouncement about putting one's hand to the plough and looking back.

It is as though He said, **"If you are going with Me, let us go; if you are staying at home, stay; but My kingdom is no place for a man with his head turned one way and his feet the other. I will have no Lot's wives, no looking back to Egypt's fleshpots. You must forget the things that are behind."**

We think here of Abraham's servant who went to look for a wife for Isaac. A man looking for a wife for himself needs all the guidance he can get; this man was looking for a wife for another and needed more guidance still! But God led him, and he found the girl, and then, just as he was ready to start home, an insidious temptation crept in. The girl's brother and mother said, "**Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go.**"

It looked innocent enough to tarry awhile. Why hurry home? But the old servant was not caught off guard. He knew that a great many things could happen in ten days: the girl might get sick, the parents might change their minds, anything could happen. So he answered, "**Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master.**"

How the Christian pilgrim today needs to learn that ready answer when Satan would delay him and have him tarry there with what appears a most innocent excuse! If we have set out to follow the Lord, there is no time to linger even for farewells. Let not the devil detain you when God has prospered your way!

The worst enemies of the Christian are not among the infidels and atheists, but in that sedate circle that lives at home in this world, to whom a man is a crank if he takes the gospel seriously.

I know who discouraged me most when I entered the ministry: it was that frigid circle who could shrug a shoulder and lift an eyebrow and say, "Be not righteous overmuch," in a fashion that, but for God's grace, would take the fire out of any man.

They were not opposed to Christ; they were church people; but their sort has quenched the spirit in more Christians than have all the infidels. One can feel the spiritual temperature drop to zero in their presence. They have caused more crooked furrows than all the higher critics.

When Christ calls us, we are not even to tell that crowd good-by. We are not to give the unburied corpses a funeral or the unholy circle a farewell. We are not even to favor them with a parting glance, for the glance will become a look, the look will become a gaze, and the plough will be left in the furrow.

There is no place in Christian discipleship for divided allegiance. If we are not with our Lord, we are against Him, and if we gather not with Him, we scatter abroad. Let us fix our eyes upon Him and beware of the three perils as common now as long ago: the peril of the Uncounted Cost, the peril of the Unburied Corpse, and the peril of the Unforsaken Circle.

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