

Discipleship and Marriage

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of counting the cost of discipleship, including the possibility of celibacy, and the need for a consistent and sacrificial commitment to Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 1:28, Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 18:22, Ecclesiastes 4:9, Matthew 5:13, Matthew 19:12, Luke 14:28-33, 1 Corinthians 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:32-33, Hebrews 13:4

Topics: "Discipleship", "Marriage"

Description

William MacDonald addresses the complex relationship between discipleship and marriage, emphasizing that while marriage is a divine institution meant for companionship, procreation, and purity, it is not a universal calling for every disciple. He highlights that some may choose celibacy to serve Christ more fully, underscoring the importance of individual guidance from God in this decision. MacDonald warns against the distractions that marriage can bring, urging believers to prioritize their commitment to Christ above all else. He encourages counting the cost of discipleship, reminding that true followers must be willing to forsake everything for the sake of the Gospel. Ultimately, he calls for a life dedicated to glorifying God, free from the entanglements of worldly desires.

Transcript

"There are some eunuchs...which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:12).

One of the major questions to be faced by every disciple is whether God has called him to married life or to celibacy. This is entirely a matter of individual guidance from the Lord. No one can legislate for another, and to interfere in such a vital sphere is a perilous business.

The general teaching of the Word of God is that marriage was instituted by God for the human race, with several purposes in mind:

1. It was ordained for companionship and pleasure. God saw that "it is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).
2. It was designed for the procreation of the race. This is indicated by the Lord's command, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

3. It was arranged for the preservation of purity in the family and in society. "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife" (1 Corinthians 7:2).

There is nothing in the Word of God to suggest that marriage is incompatible with a life of purity, devotion and service for Christ. Rather we are reminded that "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4a). The record stands that "whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing" (Proverbs 18:22). The Preacher's words can often be applied to marriage, "Two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9), particularly if the two are joined together in service for the Lord. The increased effectiveness of united action is suggested by Deuteronomy 32:30, where one chases a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight.

And yet--although marriage is God's will for the race in general, it is not necessarily His will for every individual. While it may be looked upon as an inalienable right, the disciple of the Lord Jesus may choose to forego that right in order to give himself more undistractedly to the service of Christ.

The Lord Jesus noted that in His kingdom there would be those who would become, as it were, eunuchs for His sake:

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it (Matthew 19:12).

This is definitely a voluntary vow which a person takes as a result of two factors:

1. A sense of the guidance of God to be unmarried.
2. A desire to give himself more wholly to the work of the Lord without the added responsibilities of family life.

There must be the conviction of divine call (1 Corinthians 7:7b). Only by this can the disciple be assured that the Lord will give the needed grace for continence.

Secondly, it must be voluntary. Wherever celibacy is a matter of ecclesiastical compulsion, the danger of impurity and immorality is great.

The apostle Paul emphasized the fact that an unmarried person can often give himself more fully to the King's business:

He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife (1 Corinthians 7:32, 33).

For that reason, he expressed the wish that the unmarried and widow should remain as he was, that is, unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:7, 8).

Even for those who were already married, the apostle insisted that the shortness of the time demanded that everything should be subordinated to the great task of making Christ known:

But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion

of this world passeth away (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

This certainly does not mean that a man should repudiate his home responsibilities, abandon his wife and children, and sally forth as a missionary. But it does mean that he should not live for the pleasures and satisfactions of home life. He should not use his wife and children as excuses for giving Christ second place.

C. T. Studd was fearful that his fiancée might become so occupied with him that the Lord Jesus would not have first place in her life. To avoid this, he composed a verse for her to recite daily:

Jesus, I love Thee,

Thou art to me,

Dearer than Charlie

Ever could be.

The Communists have learned to subordinate family matters to the one great task of conquering mankind for their cause. Gordon Arnold Lonsdale is an example. After he was captured in England as a Russian spy in 1960, police found a letter from his wife and a six-page reply. His wife wrote, "How unjust is life. I fully understand you are working and this is your duty and you love your work and try to do all this very conscientiously. Nevertheless my reasoning is somehow narrow-minded in a female fashion, and I suffer dreadfully. Write to me how you love me, and maybe I will feel better."

Lonsdale replied, in part: "All I am going to say is that I myself have only one life and not an easy one at that. All I want is to spend my life so that looking at it, there will be no shame in looking back...I am 39 shortly; is there much left?"¹

"The time is short," wrote Paul, "it remaineth that...they that have wives be as though they had none..."

The tragedy is that hasty or misguided marriage has often been the devil's tool to sidetrack a young disciple from a pathway of maximum usefulness for Christ. Many aspiring pioneers have forfeited careers of undivided service for Him at the marriage altar.

Marriage may be a bitter enemy of fulfilling Christ's will that all should hear of Him. "Marriage is God-given. But when it becomes a barrier to God's will it is misused. We could name many--both men and women--who have had a definite call to the foreign field and never got there because associates held them back...Nothing--not even the God-given blessing of a life mate--must hinder God's purpose for one's life...Today souls die without Christ because loved ones have taken priority over God's will."²

It is perhaps especially true in the case of pioneer workers that a life of celibacy is preferable. "Men and women of the vanguard may need to deny themselves even the necessities of life to say nothing of its softer though perfectly legitimate pleasures. The duty of such is to endure hardness, to be good soldiers, unencumbered by the things of this life, athletes unentangled by any weight...It is a vocation, a calling, and an ordination to special service."³

For those who hear this call and answer, there is the preferred reward. "Believe me," said Jesus, "when I tell you that...every man who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or land for my sake will receive it all back many times over, and will inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:28,

29--Phillips).

Counting The Cost

The Lord Jesus never tried to coax men into a glib profession of faith. Neither did He seek to attract a large following by preaching a popular message.

In fact, whenever people began to swarm after Him, He would turn to them and sift them by setting forth the sternest terms of discipleship.

On one of these occasions, our Lord warned those who would follow Him that they should first count the cost. He said:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace (Luke 14:28-32).

Here He likened the Christian life to a building operation and to a war.

It is sheer folly to start building a tower, He said, unless you are sure you have enough funds to complete it. Otherwise, the unfinished structure will stand as a monument to your lack of foresight.

How true! It is one thing to make a decision for Christ in the warm emotion of a mass evangelistic rally. But it is quite another thing to deny one's self, and take up the cross daily, and follow Christ. Although it costs nothing to become a Christian, it costs plenty to be a consistent believer walking in a path of sacrifice, separation and suffering for Christ's sake. It is one thing to begin the Christian race well, but it is quite another thing to slug it out, day after day, through fair weather and foul, through prosperity and adversity, through joy and through grief.

A critical world is watching. By some strange instinct, it realizes that the Christian life deserves everything or nothing. When it sees an out-and-out Christian, it may sneer, and scoff and ridicule--yet inwardly, it has deep respect for the man who recklessly abandons himself to Christ. But when it sees a half-hearted Christian, it has nothing but contempt. It begins to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish. He made a big commotion when he was converted, but now he's very much like the rest of us. He started out at high speed, but now he's spinning his wheels."

And so the Savior said, "You had better count the cost!"

His second illustration concerned a king who was about to declare war on another. Would it not be sensible for him first to figure whether his 10,000 soldiers would be able to defeat the enemy's army amounting to twice that amount? How absurd it would be if he should declare war first, then reconsider when the armies were marching toward each other. The only thing left would be to hoist the white flag, and to send out a surrender team, abjectly crawling in the dust, and meekly asking for terms of peace.

It is no exaggeration to liken the Christian life to war. There are the fierce enemies--the world, the flesh and the devil. There are discouragements, bloodshed, and suffering. There are the long weary hours of

vigil, and the yearning for the light of day. There are tears and toil and testings. And there is daily death.

Anyone who sets out to follow Christ should remember Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha. And then he should count the cost. It is either an absolute commitment to Christ, or a sniveling surrender with all that that means of disgrace and degradation.

With these two illustrations, the Lord Jesus warned His hearers against any impulsive decisions to be His disciples. He could promise them persecution, tribulation and distress. They should first count the cost!

And what is the cost? The next verse answers the question:

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

The cost is "everything"--all a man has and is. It meant this for the Savior; it cannot mean less for those who will follow Him. If He Who was rich beyond all description voluntarily became poor, shall His disciples win the crown by some less costly means?

Then the Lord Jesus concluded His discourse with this summation:

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savor, therewith shall it be seasoned? (Luke 14:34)

In Bible times, it seems that people did not have pure salt, such as we have on our tables today. Their salt had various impurities, such as sand, etc. It was somehow possible for the salt to lose its saltiness; the residue was insipid and worthless. It could not be used either as soil or fertilizer. At times it was used to make a footpath. Thus it was "good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matthew 5:13).

The application of the illustration is clear. There is one main purpose of the Christian's existence--to glorify God by a life that is utterly poured out for Him. The Christian may lose his savor by laying up treasures on earth, by catering to his own comfort and pleasure, by trying to make a name for himself in the world, by prostituting his life and talents on the unworthy world.

If the believer misses the central goal of his existence, then he has missed everything. He is neither utilitarian nor ornamental. His fate is, like the savorless salt, to be trampled under foot of men--by their derision, and contempt and scorn.

The final words are these:

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Often when our Lord had uttered some hard saying, He added these words. It is as if He knew that all men would not receive them. He knew that some would try to explain them away, to dull the sharp edge of His cutting demands.

But He knew also that there would be open hearts, young and old, who would bow to His claims as being worthy of Himself.

So He left the door open! "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Those who hear are the ones who count the cost and still say:

I have decided to follow Jesus,
Tho' no one joins me, still I will follow,
The world behind me, the Cross before me,
No turning back, no turning back.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-macdonald/discipleship-and-marriage/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net