

Stories from the Road #5

Stories Jesus tells as he is on his way to die outside Jerusalem^a

²⁵ Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

³⁴ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” (Luke 14:25-35)^b

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from the passage?

Q. Which character in these stories do you most identify with?

Q. What question would you like to ask Jesus?

^a Luke interviews eyewitnesses and writes his biography of Jesus to a particular person. “I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:4). In other words, he wants to add confirmation to what Theophilus already believes about Jesus. This story is from a collection of stories Jesus tells to his followers on the road as he heads towards Jerusalem to die (a journey which begins in Luke 9:51). Jesus is explaining what it will mean to follow him – and not just in a physical sense.

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Here Jesus speaks of the nature – and the cost – of following him. “Hating” ones’ family cannot be literal since Jesus upheld the 10 commandments, one of which was to “Honour your mother and father”^c. So by “hating” Jesus is talking about priorities. To be a disciple, Jesus must come first. Whatever is felt for family – or even one’s own life – must be a very distant second. “Carrying one’s cross” is the idea of following Jesus even when that will involve suffering – since Jesus carried his own cross to the place of his execution.

Jesus continues with some other short stories that spell out the nature and cost of following him. The wise thing to do when building a tower is to ensure one has the resources to complete it. So with discipleship, it’s starting the journey with the intention of finishing it. To do otherwise is foolish.

The next story is perhaps the hardest. Wisdom in battle is ensuring one has the resources to win – and that if the opposition is too great, then suing for peace. If that great opposing army represents God, then the wise thing to do is to sue for peace by becoming one of Jesus’ disciples. Suing for peace is giving up everything – which is the nature and cost of discipleship.

In the last story, Jesus turns to a common household item – salt. Salt can only achieve its purpose if it has certain qualities. Discipleship requires certain quantities – the giving up of everything. Otherwise there is no point in being a disciple.

Jesus finishes by imploring: listen to what I am saying!

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from what you have just read?

Q. In what way has this story confirmed or challenged your understanding of Jesus?

Q. What do you want to take away and ponder further?

^c The 10 commandments were given by God to Moses for the Israelite community, around 1300BC.