

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING A CHRISTIAN
“REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AS A CHRISTIAN”
 Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-33

INTRODUCTION

- A. In our text Jesus spoke realistically about the potential hardships of discipleship.
- B. Without a balanced, clearheaded view of what he is “in for” as a Christian, a person is apt to be overwhelmed. When the “bubble” bursts, his failed expectations can be not only frustrating but spiritually deadly.
- C. In 1 TH 3:1-5, Paul sought to break the *chain of disillusionment*:
 Disenchantment.
 Disappointment.
 Disaffection.
 Departure from the faith.
- D. What “advice” would we give to a person ready to become a Christian? Our answer will reveal something of our own understanding of the nature of Christianity.
- E. Understanding what it means to become a Christian involves a sober, down-to-earth awareness of what it is really *like to be* a Christian.

DISCUSSION

I. LOOKING SENSIBLY AT POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

- A. *Outside* the church.
 - 1. What can disillusion us?
 Minority status -MT 7:13,14.
 Bewilderment of those who are non-Christians -1 PE 4:3,4.
 Scoffing, mockery - HE 11:36; 2 PE. 3:1-3; Jude 18.
 Reproach -1 PE 2:12; 4:4.
 Hostility, enmity -MT 10:22; JN 15:18-21; PH 3:18,19; 1 JN3:13.
 Injustice, mistreatment -1 PE 2:18-23.
 Rejection by family -Mt. 10:21,34-39.
 Persecution.
 - a). The Christian ought not to be surprised or “shaken” by persecution - 1 TH 3:15; 1 PE 4:12-19. Cf. JN 16:1-4.
 - b). Persecution “goes with the territory” - MK 10:30; 2 TI 3:12.
 - 2. What we can do to avoid despair and defeat.
 Live above reproach -1 Pt. 2:11,12,15. E.g. Tit. 2:9,10.
 Lead a quiet life, etc. -1 TH 4:11,12.
 Exercise wisdom in relation to outsiders -CO 4:5,6. Cf. MT 10:16.
 Live “in” the world without being “of” the world. Cf. JN 17:15-18;1 CO 5:9,10.
 Never be ashamed to be counted as one of Christ’s people -MT 10:32,33; Acts 5:41.
 Rejoice, recognizing the result of hardship -JA. 1:2-4; 1 PE. 1:6-9; 4:13.
 - a). The Christian not only expects, but glories in tribulations - RO 5:3,4.
 - b). Cf. MT 5:10-12; PH. 1:29; 3:10.
 Rely on *God’s* strength and help -2 CO 1:8-10; 2 TI 4:17,18; 1 PE 5:6-11;
 2 PE. 2:9. Cf. the message of Revelation - e.g. RE 2:10,11.
- B. *Inside* the church.
 - 1. What can disillusion us?
 Those who set a bad example for us in the public worship assemblies - e.g. 1 CO 11:17-22; 14:26-40.

- Those who are confused doctrinally - 1 TH 4:13-18; 2 TH 2:1,2; etc.
 Those who are fainthearted, weak, etc. - 1 TH 5:14; 2 TH 3:6,11.
 Those who do not love Christ as they ought - RE2:4. Cf. MT 24:12.
 Those who are lukewarm - RE 3:15,16.
 Those who are hypocritical - GA 2:11-13.
 Those who only wear the name of Christ, without the reality - 1 JN 2:3, 4.
 Those who exclude us - JA 2:1-9.
 Those who betray us - 2 TI 4:10,16.
 Those who are selfish and dishonest - Acts 5:1-11.
 Those who are motivated by ego and ambition - PH 1:15,16; 2:21; 3 Jn. 9,10.
 Those who are immoral - 2 CO 12:21; JA 4:1-4.
 Those who act worse than the world - 1 CO 5:1,2; 1 TI 5:8.
 Those who completely renounce Christ - HE 6:6; 10:29; 2 PE 2:21,22.
 Those who pervert the faith of others with error and unsound teaching.
- a). Jesus warned about false teachers - MT 7:15-20.
 - b). Jesus' apostles did the same - 2 TH. 2:3-5; 1 TI 4:1,2; 2 TI 4:3,4. The revelation of Jesus Christ constitutes a *standard of truth* - JN 8:32; EP 1:13; 1PE 1:22-25.
 - 1) That standard can be deviated from - 1 CO 4:6; JA 5:19,20; 2 JN 9.
 - 2) It had been deviated from even before the close of the New Testament period GA 1:6-9; 1 TI 1:6 (cf. 6:20,21; 2 TI 2:18); 1 JN 2:18,19. E.g. 1 CO 15:12; 2 TI 2:17,18; etc.
 - c). To succumb to false teaching is:
 - 1) To have one's mind "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 CO 11:3).
 - 2) To be troubled by a perversion of the gospel - GA 1:7.
 - 3) To be bewitched - GA 3:1.
 - 4) To be hindered from obeying the truth - GA 5:7.
 - 5) To be cheated through philosophy and empty deceit - CO 2:8.
 - 6) To be defrauded of our reward - CO 2:18.
 - 7) To be made a captive - 2 TI 3:6,7.
 - 8) To be subverted - TS1:10,11.
 - d). The seriousness of false teaching is indicated by its description as a "cancer" which destroys the victim's faith - 2 TI 2:17, 18.
 - e). Times of error and apostasy are "perilous times" (2 TI 3:1-5). Cf. "perils among false brethren" (2 CO 11:26). 7) The *insidiousness* of false teaching multiplies its damage - 2 CO 11:13-15; 2 PE 2:13. Cf. EP 5:6; CO 2:4; 2 TI 3:13; 1 JN 2:26; Jude 4; etc.
 - f). Those who are unwilling to live and work peaceably with other Christians.
 - 1) Dissension among Christians takes many forms:
 - a) Unfortunate, but necessary doctrinal conflict - e.g. Acts 15:1,2.
 - b) Sharp differences of judgment - e.g. Acts 15:36-40.
 - c) Mere carnal strife — divisiveness, factionalism, etc. Cf. RO 16:17,18; GA 5:19-21; 1 TI 6:3-5; 2 TI 2:14; TS 3:10, 11; etc.

- 2) Contemplate the potential for disillusionment of new Christians at Corinth! E.g. 1 CO 1:10-13; 3:1-4; 6:1-8; 2 CO 12:20.
 - 3) Discord is demonic in origin (cf. JA 3:13-18; etc.), and Jesus knew the devastating effect it would have on potential disciples -JN 13:34,35; 17:20,21.
2. What we can do to avoid despair and defeat.
Go and make other disciples - MT 28:19,20; MK 16:15. Those who are actively involved in personal evangelism somehow have less time and inclination to bicker with their brethren. Test for truth, and hold it at all costs -1 TH 5:21; 2 TH 2:15; 1 JN 4:1. Be wholesomely independent, not excessively concerned with the approval of “important” persons, institutions, etc. -EP 4:14. Contrast JN 5:44. Keep our own lives in order -MT 7:1-5; Gal. 6:4. Contrast MT 23:4. Be genuinely forgiving and concerned to *help* our brethren -MT 18:21-35; 2 TH 3:15; 2 TI 2:25,26. Endeavor to EP 4:3. *Love* our brethren genuinely - 1 PE 2:17; 4:8; 1 JN 3:18. Rely on *God’s* strength and help -2 CO 3:4,5.
- C. *With self.*
1. What can disillusion us? Residual doubt as to “the certainty of those things in which [we] were instructed” (LK 1:4). The continued presence of sin in our lives.
 - a) Satan does not merely give up on us - 2 CO 2:11; EP 6:11; 1 PE 5:8. Cf. LK 4:13.
 - b) Old habits die hard. We will not completely negate years of conditioning at once.
 - c) We will succumb to temptation and sin, perhaps frequently at first - 1 JN 1:8-2:2.
The difficulty of the new.
 - 1) A certain amount of apprehension attends most new endeavors.
 - 2) It is somewhat uncomfortable to “break in” new habits.
 - 3) Radical changes in lifestyle, routine, time use, and even weekly schedule are not always easy to make — e.g. the situation of the person who has never attended church services regularly.
 - 4) The vast number of new things to learn and do may seem overwhelming.
 - d) Fluctuation of feelings.
 - 1) We may find it difficult to “feel” forgiven.
 - 2) We may not “feel” religious, spiritual, etc.
 - 3) We may find we do not always “want” to do what is right.
 - e) Perplexity, difficulty of discerning what is true, right.
Cf. 2 PE 3:16. God’s chastening -HE 12:5-11.
The possibility of setbacks, serious lapses - e.g. Acts 8:9-13,18-24. The possibility of complete apostasy from the faith -MT 13:20-22.
 - 1) The Christian is in danger of “drifting” - HE 2:1; 4:1; etc.
 - 2) Such departure from the faith may begin surprisingly quickly - e.g. GA 1:6.
 2. What we can do to avoid despair and defeat.
 - a) Maintain a sane, pragmatic attitude.

- 1) *Cautiousness.* a) Watchfulness, soberness –MT 26:41; 1 TH 5:6; 1 PE 1:13.
 - b) Heedfulness -1 CO 10:12.
 - c) Guardedness with respect to the heart -PR 4:23. Cf. MK 7:20-23.
 - d) Prudence -MT 10:16. Cf. LK 16:8.
 - e) Circumspection - EP 5:15-17.
- 2) *Introspection.* a) Spiritual-mindedness –MT 6:19-21,24 (cf. LK 12:20,21). Cf. MT 16:23; 22:21; LK 2:49; JN 6:27; RO 8:5, 6.
 - b) Self-examination -2 CO 13:5.
 - c) Meditation -PH 4:8.
 - d) “Consideration” of Christ -HE 12:1-3.
3. Live for God one day at a time -Mt. 6:33, 34. Whatever the future may hold, we can serve God faithfully until bedtime today. Today’s duties will be no greater than we can fulfill.
4. Aspire to excellence, not mediocrity. Not merely followers, but *close* followers. Cf. LK 22:54. Not merely hearers, but *doers* -MT 7:24-27. Not merely learners, but learners *growing* in obedience -1 TI 4:15. Cf. 2 TI 3:7. Not merely sowers, but *bountiful* sowers -2 CO 9:6. Cf. GA 6:7,8.
5. Ask, seek, knock -MT 7:7,8.
6. Take time for what matters most -LK 10:38-42.
7. Persist in prayer -LK 18:1-8.
8. Rely on *God’s* strength and help.
 - 1) God will provide our defense against Satan’s assaults.
 - a) We are not helpless before Satan - 1 CO 10:13; EP 6:10-13; 2 TH 3:3; JA 4:7. Cf. EP 4:27; 1 PE 5:9.
 - b) The Christian is on the side of victory over evil - RO 12:9.
 - 2) God displays His strength through our weakness and need.
 - a) There is more to the Christian’s life than externals might suggest - 2 CO 4:8,10; 6:8-10. Cf. 4:16-18.
 - b) When we are “weak,” then are we “strong” - 2 CO 12:9,10.
 - c) God is our Helper in time of need -HE 4:16. Cf. PH 4:13.
 - d) In Christ, there is triumph and peace - JN:1,27; 16:33.

II. COUNTING THE COST

- A. *Following* Jesus. God invites “followers” -JN:26. But many have started to follow, then changed their minds -JN 6:66.
- B. *Following through.* Jesus warned: LK 9:62. We would do well to “remember Lot’s wife” (LK 17:32). Cf. GE 19:26. It is not merely the beginning of the Christian life that matters — the end result is more important - GA 3:3; Phil. 1:6. All’s well that *ends* well! Constancy, endurance, patience are required -GA 6:9; HE. 10:35-39.
- C. Counting the *cost*. As with Jesus Himself, the Christian’s glory lies beyond his cross - LK 14:25-27. Cf. 24:25,26. Not to count the cost of discipleship is foolish -LK 14:28-33.
- D. Making the *commitment*.
 1. Becoming a Christian involves making the most radical commitment -RE 2:10.
 2. The marriage commitment comes closest to illustrating the depth of the Christian’s commitment to Christ. Cf. EP 5:22-33.
 3. It has been suggested that Christ is asking:
Will you trust Me with your entire life? Cf. 2 CO 3:4,5.

Will you entrust yourself to My family? Cf. RO 12:5.

Will you “wear the towel”? Cf. JN 13:3-17.

4. For the Christian, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (PH 1:21). Cf. GA 2:20; PH 3:7,8.
- E. Pressing toward the *goal*.
Whatever the present “light affliction” may be, it does not compare with the “eternal weight of glory” (2 CO 4:16-18).
The Christian’s “citizenship is in heaven” (PH 3:20, 21).
- F. Meanwhile, he must adopt a sound, reasonable attitude toward the exigencies of this life — and he must “press toward the goal” (PH 3:12-14). (HE 12:1-3).
Ultimately, the Christian looks to the victory of the resurrection - 1 CO 15:50-58.

CONCLUSION

- A. It is important not only for the prospective convert, but also for the Christian himself to contemplate *the significance of being a Christian*. In contrast to whatever he was before, the Christian is:
A *new person*, a new “creation” for whom all things have become new - 2 CO 5:17.
A person who uniquely *belongs* to God - 1 CO. 6:20.
A person of *faith* who lives by trust in God - 2 CO 5:7.
A *consecrated* person who lives a pure life - 1 PE 1:15.
A *secure* person whose salvation is protected by God’s power - 1 PE 1:5.
A person who *serves* God - 1 Thess. 1:9.
A person with relationships and responsibilities to *other* Christians - RO 12:5.
A *realistic* person who has counted the cost and made a true commitment - LK 14:27.
- B. GA 2:20.