The Cost of Discipleship BY Malusi Skunyana

Read Luke 9:23-26

LUKE 9:23 And he said to [them] all, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

LUKE 9:24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

LUKE 9:25 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

LUKE 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and [in his] Father's, and of the holy angels.

Jesus’ warning to His disciples teaches us that following Christ is not easy; it entails suffering, hardship, and persecution. Jesus calls on each disciple to take up his cross and follow Him daily notwithstanding the difficulties one may encounter on the way. If we are to wear the crown of victory someday we first have to bear the cross today.

It was after Peter had confessed his faith in Jesus as the “Christ of God” that Jesus called on His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him daily. Immediately after Peter’s confession, Jesus told the disciples about His imminent suffering and death on the cross. Of course, the disciples did not welcome the news of His suffering and death. They just did not understand why He had to die. They expected Him to take the throne and be the king of Judah; this was their joyous anticipation throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry. But Jesus wanted them to understand that there could be no crown without the cross. He had not come to sit on David’s throne as king of Judah, but had come to bear the cross and die the death of shame in order to redeem men from sin and eternal death. Through His death, many would be won to the kingdom of God, which they would inherit when Christ would be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. But before He could wear the kingly crown, Jesus had to go to the cross to redeem us. The cost of our salvation was the death of the Son of God, and it pleased the Father to give up His only Son to death so that by His death God could gain many sons and daughters.

Although salvation was offered to us as a gift, that does not mean it was cheap, it cost the death of the Son of God. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that as He had a cross to bear on their behalf, they also had to bear their cross and follow Him on the path of self-denial. He wanted them to know that just as the world had hated Him – their Master – it would also hate them. When Christ would return to heaven leaving His disciples in this world, Satan would turn his weapons on them and would intensify his attacks against them to the close of time. The warfare that awaited the disciples was not against flesh and blood, but against the higher powers and forces of the evil one. But we can thank God that in the Christian warfare victory is guaranteed to those who put their trust in Jesus. They will overcome the devil through the blood of Jesus the Lamb that was slain for the sin of the world.

Jesus explained to the disciples that cross bearing was a daily process. In other words, they had to live for Him in their daily lives. As His followers, they would have to be pure, true, and holy just as He was. When asked to choose between being true to God’s principles and following the customs of the world, they would have to be true to God. In their daily lives, they had to show that their loyalty lay with God regardless of the immediate earthly consequences. If called upon to lay down their lives in order to lift up the banner of heaven, they would have to follow their Saviour in the path of suffering and death. It would be better for them to lose something in this life and gain something in the life to come, than gain all things in this life only to lose eternal life when Jesus comes again. Jesus did not romanticize the Christian life in this world, it would not be easy, and whoever wanted to follow Him needed to be prepared to endure hardship and suffering in order to win the crown of life.

Dear friend, it is true that God has prepared wonderful things in heaven for those who will deny themselves and follow Jesus no matter what. But before we taste of the eternal inheritance, we need to bear our cross and follow Jesus daily. We need to show by our lifestyle that we live by different principles, principles that are separate and distinct from those of the world. We need to show that we do not belong in this world, that we are strangers and pilgrims in this world, longing for our heavenly home. If we are to inherit all things with Christ in God’s kingdom, we need to be prepared to give up any earthly treasure and even lose our lives if need be in order to live out the principles of heaven. Jesus invites us to follow Him daily and He promises to give us an eternal reward. Though the road may be rough and thorny, but the journey will be sweet as we travel with Jesus. He has promised to be with us always until the end of time. Trials and tribulations need not discourage us, for they only bring us close to Jesus. I pray that God will give you strength for each day, hope to illuminate your path, and faith to cling on His promises as you continue to follow the Master. May God bless and keep you! Amen!