

Word notes Sunday 03/02/2013 Tony Hodge
Discipleship, Marriage & Sexuality

Summary (read this bit out to remind cell members what was said on Sunday)

Key Texts: Matthew 16:24-26, Luke 14:25 - 15:10

True discipleship – following Jesus – involves a serious decision, self denial and action. While salvation is freely given it certainly wasn't at no cost to God nor is there no cost to ourselves. We should think instead that the "freely" part is more to do with us being undeserving.

Jesus made it very clear in Luke that to be worthy disciples we should put him first, loving him more than even our closest relatives. He also said we should count the cost of being His, comparing this to a major decision made by a builder or ruler.

The big issue for us all is whether we will truly deny ourselves or will we continue to stand on our rights to do as we please? In three examples (Mark 10:17-27, John 8:3-11 & John 4:7-30) Jesus faces people up to this choice but not in a judgemental way. Instead he shows love (Mark 10:21, Compassion (John 8:11) and acceptance (John 4:7). In none of these however did Jesus compromise God's truth or justice – how can we be true disciples and yet treat others with love and compassion who have different ideas of right or wrong, who have the post-modernist view of universalism and individual rights?

Instead of starting with a judgemental attitude, which leads us away from compassion and acceptance, let's look to our own failings first. In the current debate and decision in Parliament about same-sex marriage, instead of judging those who wish to form such a union let's first realise that all of us has fallen short of God's standard for sexual relations and family of "one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others and for life" if only in our thoughts and fantasies even if not physically. Then we might be able to see that any and all who would be a disciple should deny themselves and their wrongful desires not just the "others" who are different to ourselves. We must seek to deny our "My Way" ways and ask Him to help us to carry whatever cross we have, yet keeping our eyes firmly on Him.

If we can do that then let's move on to praying for our nation and how it defines marriage. We can ask for God's Ways to be upheld in our nation, knowing that as we do we may suffer being labelled bigots or accused of hating or fearing Gay people when in fact we know that inside we all fall short and none is better than another.

But let's not lose our saltiness (Lk 14:34), nor allow grace to be replaced with license and so deny Jesus' Lordship rather than our own selves (Jude 1:3-4) yet still find it in our hearts to accept and sit at table with the lost so that they may be found (Mk 15:1-10).

Application (this is the bit where cell members get to participate. Lead discussions around these points)

Jesus challenge in Matthew 16:24-26 has four parts. Discuss these as set out below. Are they easy or hard, what is most difficult, have you really got to grips with each? What aspects of your life would pull you away from them? Identify areas for prayer and pray for each other:

1. To have a sincere desire to belong to Christ – "If any man be WILLING to be my disciple".
2. To deny, or renounce ourselves fully - in all respects and perseveringly "LET HIM DENY HIMSELF".
Going our own way, indulging our desires is to the prime cause of most of our miseries.
3. To embrace the condition to which God has appointed us. To bear the troubles and difficulties we may meet with in walking the Christian road to "TAKE UP OUR CROSS".
4. To imitate Jesus, and do and suffer all in his spirit - Let us "FOLLOW HIM".

Witness (this is the bit where the cell talks and prays about how to share the Good News)

How does Jesus manage to keep righteousness and compassion in balance when talking to the people in the 3 examples given? How might we do the same in 21st century situations like sexuality, morality as a whole and the apparent overriding importance of individual rights above all else?