

INTRODUCTION

When I lived in Barberton 30 years ago, I went witnessing door-to-door one time using James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion*. I shared the gospel with many people, one of whom "made a decision for Jesus."

Evangelical Christians like us use those buzz words all the time don't we? We talk about people "making a decision for Jesus." That clearly implies that people have to actually decide something in order to be saved. But what is it specifically that they have to decide?

That is the ultimate life and death question and I'm going to answer it today. Turn to the passage that I read in that regard, Luke 14:25-33.

MAKING A DECISION FOR JESUS

The first point that I want to make is this. On their own, people are dead to the spiritual realm. And because they are, they're incapable of making any kind of decision for Jesus. Something has to happen first and that something is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in their minds and hearts. The Holy Spirit has to enlighten, convict, and compel. When He does, people are then capable of making a decision for Jesus.

They themselves of course must then actually do that. The Holy Spirit won't do it for them. They must actually make the decision for Jesus. He Himself teaches us just that in Luke 14.

He uses two analogies here. In the first, verses 28-29, a man decides to build a tower. In the second, verses 30-32, a king decides to wage war. In the same way, Jesus says, a person decides to follow Him. So let's be clear about that from the start. A person must make a decision for Jesus in order to be saved.

And it must be a well thought out one. That's Jesus' basic thrust in verses 28-32. Let's go back to His analogies again and the language that He uses in them. Notice what the man must do before he decides to build the tower. According to verse 28, he must **sit down** and **calculate** the cost **to see** if he has enough resources to complete it. Now notice what

the king must do before he decides to wage war. According to verse 31, he must **sit down** and **consider** whether he is strong enough to wage it. Their decisions, in other words, must be carefully thought out. It's the same way, Jesus says here, with the decision that people make for Him. It must be carefully out.

That teaches us what is just a vital truth. Insight and understanding are the conditions within which the Holy Spirit does His evangelistic work. He works through people's insight and understanding to bring them to Jesus.

So many Christians today just don't grasp that. Unlike the Holy Spirit, they rely not on insight and understanding but emotion instead. They create highly charged environments of one kind or another that elicit strong emotions like happiness, excitement, dread, or fear. They then try to work through those emotions to bring people to Jesus.

About ten years ago, for instance, my home church sponsored a three night evangelistic drama, one that was purposely designed to create a highly charged and emotional ambience. It quite frankly struck a deep sense of fear in the unsaved who attended it. The carefully planned altar calls then built on that. Consequently, over 350 people went forward over the weekend to make a decision for Jesus.

Or did they? I reiterate something that I said in a sermon several months ago. It's a profound insight. Emotion does not reliably generate faith and commitment, if it generates them at all. It may get people to go to the altar or to say the sinner's prayer. But it rarely generates any kind of lasting faith in and commitment to Jesus in them.

My home church found that out the hard way. Everyone was all excited of course about the 350 people. But a one-year follow up revealed that only 10 of those were actively attending a church. It's a hard lesson to learn but emotion does not reliably generate faith and commitment. Going *only* through people's emotions does not bring about lasting changes in character and behavior.

That's especially so when it comes to Jesus. He Himself makes that

clear in Luke 14. He wants the decision that people make for Him to be well thought out. Consequently, the Holy Spirit doesn't go around their mental processes, but through them to bring them to Him. Insight and understanding, not emotion, generate the kind of decision for Jesus that He calls us to make. It must be a clear-cut and well thought out one.

THREE DECISIONS FOR JESUS

But what is that clear-cut decision? What specifically must we decide? Over the years, I've had a great deal of experience either leading people to make a decision for Jesus or ministering to those who already had. Based on that experience, I believe that people make one of three basic decisions for Jesus. Let examine each of those.

First, some decide to let Him forgive them. They've done bad things and feel horribly guilty because they have. That guilt is weighing them down and making them miserable and they desperately want it gone. So, they decide to let Jesus forgive them and take it away. They say the sinner's prayer and mean it. They confess their sins and based on His shed blood, ask Him to forgive them for them.

But that's all that they want Him to do. They want Him to forgive them but not intrude any further than that into their lives. What they've essentially decided is just to enjoy forgiveness at Jesus' expense. They really want nothing more to do with Him than that.

The great A. W. Tozer identified and assessed this first kind of decision for Jesus. He declared, *"a notable heresy has come into being throughout evangelical Christian circles – the widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need Him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to Him as Lord as long as we want to."*

That does accurately describe so many people's response to Jesus. They decide to accept Him as Savior and let Him take away their guilt. But they decide not to accept Him as Lord and obey Him. Dallas Willard calls those who do that "vampire Christians." The only thing that they

want from Jesus is His blood and the forgiveness it brings.

I told you before about the father who broke down and wept in front of me because he had signed for his underage daughter to have two abortions. What I didn't tell you is this. After he told me what he had done, I explained to him that Jesus had died and shed His blood on the cross for those specific sins of his. I then told him about the sinner's prayer and asked him if he'd like to say it. Overwhelmed with guilt and wanting it gone, he eagerly agreed to do so and did. I subsequently tried to follow up with and disciple him but he didn't want any part of that. I didn't know why then but I do now. He had decided to let Jesus forgive him and that's it. He wanted no other involvement with Him than that.

A second basic decision for Jesus that some people make is this. They decide to let Him help them. There is an area or more likely several areas of their lives in which they're having problems that they, on their own, can't solve. So, they want Him to assist them in those areas with those problems. They have felt needs and decide to let Jesus help them with them.

But that's all that they want Him to do. They want Him to leave them alone otherwise. What they've done is make Him "part of their lives" as we say it. They need Him here, here, and here in their lives and want Him to come here, here, and here and help them. But they don't need Him there, there, and there in their lives and want Him to stay away from there, there, and there.

I knew a Cleveland businessman who was scared to death of dying. He was so afraid in fact that he'd often wake up at night in cold sweats. He was at the end of his ropes when he met a Christian at the airport who told him about Jesus. The Christian explained that Jesus would give him eternal life if he'd "pray to receive him" and so that's exactly what he did. He received Him into that part of his life that was afraid of dying – and no more. When the Christian tried to follow up with Him later and get Him to learn more about Jesus, he wasn't interested in doing so. The decision he had made, you see, was quite particularized. It was to let

Jesus help Him with His fear of dying and that's all.

There's a third basic decision for Jesus that some people, only a few actually, make. It's the decision to discipleship. They decide to let Him govern them. That is the gist of verses 27 and 33. Jesus tells His audience that they have to carry their cross and give up their possessions to Him. Do you get what He's telling them and us to do here? It's to give up our lives as we understand them. We quit governing us and let Him govern us. That is the true essence of discipleship to Jesus.

I've explained many times before what that means as a practical matter, in our everyday lives. We firmly make and carry out the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says. To make that decision means to intend it. To carry out that decision means to arrange all of our affairs around it. Being with Jesus in order to learn and do all that He says becomes our "business as usual" so to speak. We have nothing better or even as good to do. Everything else is secondary or subservient to that. We are letting Him govern us in other words.

Those then are the three basic decisions for Jesus that people make. They decide to let Him forgive them, help them, or govern them.

THE RIGHT DECISION

So which of those three should we make? Jesus tells us plainly in this passage. It's the third. We should decide to let Him govern us.

Verse 26 explains why. This verse isn't about misery. It's about clarity. Anyone who objectively and intelligently examines discipleship to Jesus will grasp something – its superiority over literally everything else in life including family. In light of the gain and loss that it involves, it is without doubt the greatest bargain in life. The gain, in other words, far exceeds the loss.

What is that gain? I'll tell you quite simply. It's all of God's promises in the Bible. You know the ones I'm talking about. All things work together for our good. We can do all things through Christ. There is now no condemnation to us. His power works mightily in us. He will

give us understanding in everything. We are His friends. We will overcome the world. Father God will give us whatever we ask. His power grants us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Our joy will be made complete. We will become perfect as our heavenly Father is and many more. Those are just a few of God's promises.

But to whom do they belong? Do they belong to those who let Jesus forgive them? Do they belong to those who let Him help them? Do they belong to those who let Him govern them?

Last Sunday, I listened to America's favorite televangelist. During the course of his sermon, he dramatically pointed his finger at the 35,000 people in his church and the millions watching on TV and declared, *"God's promises are for you."* The problem is that most certainly isn't so for many if not most of the ones who heard him say it.

Listen carefully to what I'm going to say. God's promises are not for those who decide to let Jesus forgive them. They're not for those who decide to let Him help them. They're for those and only those who decide to let Him govern them.

One author uses a powerful metaphor that says it well. He compares God's promises to divine checks. He then declares, *"But before we try to cash those checks, notice that they are made out to disciples of Jesus."* He's absolutely right. The checks of God's promises are made out to disciples of Jesus. They're for those and only those who have decided to let Him govern them.

CONCLUSION

With all of that in mind, I close with the two most important personal questions that you will ever be asked. First, have you made a decision for Jesus? And second, if you have, what is the specific decision that you've made. If it isn't the decision to discipleship then you're making the biggest mistake of your life. Correct that mistake this day, right now even. Make the right decision for Jesus. Decide to let Him govern you.