

# Convention Speech

## Following After Jesus\*

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### Introduction:

We are pleased to be present with you on this 31<sup>st</sup> annual Convention, and to have a part in the program which has been arranged. We are also pleased with the general theme of this Convention, which is: Disciples of Christ. It struck me that such a theme would be chosen in a day when there seems to be considerable confusion as to precisely what constitutes a disciple of Christ; when young people go from the one extreme of seeking independence, and appearing unwilling to follow after anybody, to the other extreme of being “Jesus people.” Indeed, we live in a day when it becomes increasingly difficult to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. In the light of this, we say again, that we are pleased to help in the development of this theme.

We also suppose that the first speaker who addressed you on the theme: The Mark of the Disciple, also defined for you the significance of the term “Disciple.” Knowing the thoroughness with which the first speaker usually treats his subject matter, we believe he has given you the Scriptural idea of a disciple. Consequently we will not take the time to define this part of our subject except to point out how the text given to us uses the term. We were asked simply to speak on the: “Costliness of Being a Disciple.” And the suggested text given to me is: Matthew 16:24, which reads as follows: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

There are two things in the context that ought to be pointed out, and which have bearing on the text proper.

The first one has to do with the versus 13ff. where Jesus is said to be in Caesarea Philippi, and where He asks His disciples concerning His identity. He first asks them: Who do men say that I the Son of man am? To this question the disciples offer various answers: “Some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and other Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” He then asks the disciples: “But who say ye that I am?” Simon Peter, answering for the disciple group, replies: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus, after first pronouncing a blessing upon Peter for having made this confession, then informs him that the answer could not have come from him, but through the revelation of His Father in heaven. And He marks this confession as constituting the very basis upon which God will build his church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

The second matter of which the context speaks is the important information which Jesus gave His disciples concerning His suffering and death in Jerusalem, and Peter’s reaction to it. The Lord was very conscious at this time of the suffering which was about to be imposed upon Him by the leaders of the Jews, and of His death and resurrection which would follow, Peter began to rebuke Him, saying: “Be it far from thee Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” Jesus

interprets this rebuke as being the very words of Satan, and at the same time an indication of the wrong understanding the disciples had of the reason for following Him. This latter because the occasion for His pronouncement of the words of our text. As the word “then” indicates, it was the proper time for Jesus to instruct His disciples in the true meaning of discipleship, and the requirements true discipleship demands.

With these remarks in mind, we would like to speak to you for a little while on the subject: FOLLOWING AFTER JESUS. Concerning this subject, there are three questions we would like to raise and answer. What does it mean? What does it require? And, Unto what does it lead?

### I. *What does it mean?*

To come after Jesus means to be His disciple. But what is involved in being a disciple of Jesus? In the light of the context this is an important question. We should not forget that though the disciples through Peter had made a wonderful confession: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” they nevertheless did not understand the full implications of that confession. To them the term “Christ” was synonymous with glory, honor, power, the ascent to the mighty throne of David, a way of conquest and victory. And discipleship was for them considered from the viewpoint of the question: Who shall be the greatest? When Jesus therefore informed them that He was going to suffer and die, this violently clashed with the conception they had of Him. And when he intimated that discipleship consisted not in merely becoming great, but it entailed bearing a cross after Him; this, too, violently militated against their conception of the disciple.

True discipleship consists, first of all, in hearing and receiving His Word. That is to say, His entire Word, not merely that part of it which may appear acceptable to us. It is the Word of Him Who is the truth. And that Word becomes an awful Word of Jesus. It is the Word that condemns all self-righteousness of men. It closes the kingdom of heaven against all whose righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. It condemns the world of unrighteousness, and insists that we have no righteousness of ourselves, that we are corrupt and inclined to all evil as we are by nature, that we are guilty, undone, and worthy of death and damnation. It leaves no hope for the natural man, no ground on which he can merit before God. And at the same time that Word of Jesus reaches down to us in our hopelessness only to declare to us a righteousness of God. A righteousness which is perfect because it is founded on the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord, and that can be ours only as an eternal gift of free grace. It is the Word concerning a righteousness which is freely imputed to us, that is wrought in us through the Spirit of Christ, that justifies us freely and sanctifies us wholly, and that makes us new creatures in an old world, light in the midst of darkness, citizens of heaven while we are in the midst of worldly Babylon. O, that Word contains still more. It demands of us that we fight the fight of faith unto the end. That we be holy as God is holy in all our walk of life. That we forsake the world and its lusts, and be of God’s party in every phase of life.

Indeed, to be a disciple of Jesus, you must hear and receive His Word. And it is not enough that you merely hear it. O, to be sure, it is necessary that we ever come under the hearing of that Word. But there is much more. That Word must be hidden in our hearts. The hearer must also receive what he hears. It must be an abiding factor in his innermost spiritual being. That

Word must be the controlling principle in one's whole life, shall he be a disciple of Jesus. He cannot walk without it. It must guide him wherever he goes. It must shed light on his pathway. It must draw and lead him to the light. A true disciple listens continually to that Word of Christ, and always he asks what the will and the word of Christ is. Always he is hearing, receiving, and doing that Word. So, and so only, can one come after Jesus.

At this point we wish to ask you young people, considering all that is implied in being a disciple of Jesus: Would you be a disciple of Jesus? You feel the awful import of this question, don't you?

Today it is becoming popular among youth of our time to be "Jesus' people." As we said in our opening remarks, the crazy bent of youth is to swing from one extreme sweep of the pendulum to the very opposite extreme. One day, not long ago, the young would recognize no one whom they would follow, casting off from them all authority, and living riotously as revolutionaries. Today, the sweep of the pendulum moves them in the apparently pious direction – to follow after Jesus. Not, you understand, the Jesus of the Scriptures, Who is the son of God come into the flesh, the Jesus Who took upon Him the guilt of the sins of His people, and bore that guilt unto the tree of the cross, in order to remove it from before the face of God. Of that Jesus they do not know, no do they want Him to be their leader. Not the Jesus Who speaks to us the Word of God which discloses our depravity, and the need of a righteousness which God has prepared, which righteousness only will allow us to enter through the gates of His heavenly kingdom – but a Jesus of their imagination – a Jesus who is a super star.

I am not speaking today to young people who would have a Jesus that will allow them to rock and roll; nor is my question directed to those who would claim to follow such a Jesus. But I ask you, Protestant Reformed youth, who have become acquainted with the Word of God, and have met therein the Jesus of the Scriptures: Would you be His disciple? If your answer is: Yes; then you have heard and received His Word, and hid it in your hearts. That Word will be the principle whereby your whole life is regulated and controlled. This is a very important question, and very personal, which you must answer. When you are one of Jesus' disciples, you will to come after Him!

But you know, don't you, that no man wills or can will to come after Him, as he is by nature. All men by nature are carnal. They love darkness rather than light. They love and seek the world, rather than the kingdom of heaven. They love their own word, and would hear the word of man, rather than to have anything to do with the Word of God and of Christ. The natural man wills just the opposite of following after Jesus. O, he may have an imaginary Jesus, who he has concocted in his own mind, who he will follow – but not the Jesus of the Scriptures.

You and I must understand that the will to come after Jesus is the fruit of mere and sovereign grace. To follow and to will to come after Jesus, is the result of His efficacious call. He calls you and you come after Him. He speaks His almighty Word, and you obey it. He irresistibly says: Follow Me! and His disciples say spontaneously: I come! Strange as it may seem, he who wills to come after Jesus is already after Him. It is the choice of his heart. He who hears and receives His Word, will be Jesus' disciple.

Now I was asked to speak to you today especially on: The Costliness of Discipleship. And so now I come to the heart of this subject when I call your attention to:

## II. *What does it require?*

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

You will notice that the Lord specifies especially three requirements: self-denial, cross bearing, and following Him. Allow me briefly to delineate each of these requirements.

The first, and perhaps the most humiliating requisite of true discipleship is self-denial. But what does that mean?

Literally self-denial means: to disown, to renounce self. It means in the most absolute sense that we must forget about ourselves, give up our own interests. Self-denial is the very opposite of maintaining one's self. It is that act whereby one becomes nothing in his own eyes. It is the will not too insist on one's name and position, one's honor and glory, one's means and possessions, yea, even one's own life.

You must understand that the Lord does not say that you must deny something to yourself, if you would be His disciple. If the Lord had said that, it might be comparatively easy to be His disciples. That kind of self-denial, one finds in the world, and often also in the church. Men will deny themselves much for many reasons when it involves themselves. They will deny themselves food and drink which otherwise they crave, if their health is at stake. They will deny themselves leisure and rest, if the object of their ambition is involved. Paradoxical as it may seem, men will deny themselves the world and the things of the world. Remarkably Jesus says something much different than this. Never did He say: deny yourself something, then you will be my disciples. No – His requirement is an absolute one. He says: deny yourself!

That means, everything you have and are. It implies that before God and His Christ you do not insist on your own righteousness, and that you confess that you are utterly lost in yourself. It means that you experience and confess that you find all your righteousness, yea, all you need for your salvation in Christ alone. It implies that before men you seek not the praise of men, but are always ready to suffer reproach and even death if necessary for Christ's sake.

Indeed, this self-denial is quite contrary to the spirit of the world. The world wants men that have ambition to make for themselves a name, who have the energy to gain riches and position in life. And it offers riches, fame, and pleasures to all who will follow her. Christ, on the other hand, demands the very opposite. He offers you no inducement to self-ambitions, but condemns them. He requires complete abandoning of self, shall we be His disciples.

The second requirement necessary for true discipleship is that we take up our cross.

The cross of which Jesus here speaks is said by some to refer to what Scripture calls the "old man of sin," the corrupt nature the disciple retains after his regeneration and conversion; the old nature which the apostle Paul admonishes should be mortified. Accordingly, when the old nature overpowers one so that he falls into sin, he is supposed to have a cross with which he has to contend. For example, a Christian may be quick-tempered and fly off the handle, as they say. Quite often he will even excuse himself when he does this with the remark: "I'm sorry, but you

will please excuse me for what I said, for my hot temper got the best of me. You see, that's the cross I have to bear. In my opinion that is not a cross, but an evil nature that often rules over us, and we would do well to get rid of it.

Neither is the cross the affliction and sufferings one often bears in this life. Many speak of sickness and pain as so many crosses we have to bear. But hardly can the suffering in the body and mind in the world be an emblem of the cross of which Jesus speaks.

Rather, the cross is always centrally the cross of Christ. Not, you understand, when that cross is the emblem and means of atonement; for then it stands uniquely alone. In this sense there is only one cross, and that is the cross which Christ alone bore, and upon which He alone suffered and died. But Jesus meant that His cross which is the ultimate expression of the hatred of the world against God and His Anointed must also be ours. You see, His cross and our cross are closely related. The world hated Him because He was of God and they are of the world. And the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they hated Him they also hate them that will come after Him. For His is in them, and becomes manifest through them. His cross reflects in the crosses they bear who will follow Jesus. And when you bear that cross, you take it up. You must assume the burden of it. One who takes up a burden assumes willingly to carry it. So also one who takes up the cross, expresses thereby the willingness to not only bear it, but also to suffer its reproach. Cross-bearing is inevitable for the true disciple of Jesus. Jesus' disciples do not come after Him to gain a crown in this world, but he who wills to be His disciple must will to deny himself and bear the reproach of Christ in this world.

The third requisite of true discipleship Jesus imposes upon us is: "And follow Me."

That means, of course, that Jesus must lead. Never may the opposite be true. Indeed there are many in our day who would have the opposite be true. They would have you do something for Jesus. And when you follow this conception through you find that they make Jesus to follow them. No! Jesus must lead. He must command. He must speak first. He must tell us first of His cross. This is precisely what Peter, according to the context, failed to understand. He did not want Jesus to lead, to go before His cross: but Peter would bear his cross before Jesus. In reality Jesus always leads. He was the obedient Servant to the Father. He entered the evil world in which we live, assuming our nature in which He could suffer and die. Here He was mocked and despised. Here He suffered and died. "Yes, here He went on before us bearing His cross.

And we must follow Him. O, this cannot surely mean that we must or can go through what He did. That would be utterly impossible. As we pointed out before, there is an aspect of His cross which we cannot, nor need to bear. But follow Him we must nevertheless. Listening to His Word of the cross, and never asserting our own notions, and never saying: Lord, this shall never be unto Thee. But following willingly, submissively, silently; we bear His reproach, renouncing our own judgment to the Word of the Lord, and denying ourselves completely. That is bearing the cross and following Jesus.

III. *Unto what does it lead?*

When Jesus leads, and we follow Him, what will we experience as far as this world is concerned? Well, young people, your end will be His end. Being by His grace His disciples, you will experience shame, reproach, suffering, and ultimately death. For you see Jesus not only

taught us that we shall be His disciples we must be partakers of His anointing, but also His suffering. Would you follow Jesus, you can expect nothing more in this world. He warns you that as they persecuted Him so they will also persecute you. The world and the power of darkness will persecute you in every sphere of life, if you will hear and obey the Lord; while you take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow Him.

Are you prepared for that? Make no mistake about it, this will surely happen to you. And we would warn you that the Scriptures predict that in the last days this suffering will become more intense. Jesus forewarned us that when Antichrist will come the elect of God will experience suffering so severe that if God had not shortened the days the very elect of God would not be able to endure. These days, we believe, are fast coming upon us. Overnight the peace and quiet we now enjoy, may be changed. Now it is quite easy to be a Christian. We may still go to church, and worship as we please. We may still enjoy our society life, where unmolested we may study God's Word. No one appears to bother us. But it will not continue thus. The day is not far away when the power of darkness will break forth in all its fury, against the church, and against the people of God. In fact, even now, if we would let our light shine more than we do, we would experience more opposition than we do. In the light of this, would you still be Jesus' disciple? This is what it is going to cost you, if you would remain true to Him.

Yet, let not this discourage you! You have every reason to rejoice and to be exceeding glad. For your reward shall be great! If this were not so, you would have reason to be the most miserable of all creatures. But remember, Jesus leads! He went on before you. He suffered and died, but He also arose from the dead. And He ascended to highest glory. And He has promised to give unto His faithful disciples His glory. In the way of faithfulness, they shall also attain unto it. This is His Word, "If ye shall deny Me before men, I will also deny you before My Father which is in heaven." If we by His grace deny ourselves, and follow Him, bearing our cross, He will lead you and me unto everlasting glory. May He continue to give unto us that grace whereby we may continue to fight the good fight of faith, even unto the end, that no one take our crown.

\*Prepared from notes used at the convention.

Originally Published in:

Vol. 31 No. 6 October 1971