

eQuip 2015 Sunday Service, Hermannsburg Congregation 4 January 2015

Dear congregation,

How much does a car cost? I suppose it depends on the type, condition and quality of the car. If a price sounds too good to be true, usually it is too good to be true.

A colleague of mine once received a call from a pastor from another Church. "Your son is going to university next year?" "Yes" "Does he have a car yet?" "No"

"I want to sell my car to him." "For how much?" "I would rather speak to him directly" the reply came.

He called his son, and after the call the son said: Daddy, he wants to sell his car to me for one hundred rand.

What is the catch, the Dad immediately wanted to know. "There is no catch" "Of course there is - this is too good to be true!"

It turned out that that pastor actually wanted the boy to have this perfectly good car, with fairly low mileage, but did not just want to give it away. He wanted the boy to "own it", even if only for R 100.00

Sometimes when something sounds too good to be true, it is indeed true!

At our eQuip retreat we are discussing discipleship. Yesterday we talked about the nature of discipleship. Today we speak about the cost of discipleship. Tomorrow we will ask how disciples can be nurtured, and on the last full day we will deal with the question of our own calling.

What is **the cost of discipleship** - this is a difficult question.

In Luke 18 we read:

A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'

"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in

heaven. Then come, follow me."

When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"

"Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

The man wants to have eternal life - but the asking price is too much.

Peter, hearing this, states: We have left all we had in order to follow you!

How much does it cost to become a Christian, to receive salvation?

Just a few verses on, Luke remarks: The disciples did not understand what Jesus said. Even the disciples were confused. Had they sacrificed enough?

Luke precedes this passage with the episode where people want to bring their children to Jesus, but are kept at a distance. Jesus then says: Let the children come to me, for to such as these belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, if you do not receive the kingdom like a child, you shall not enter it.

How much does it cost?

The first answer is: Nothing! Receive it like a little child!

Amongst us participants there are a few small children. One of them, at arrival, was given a teddy bear. When I held it to her, she gave a huge smile, grabbed the bear and hugged it. There clearly was no thought of: How much does it cost? Is it mine to keep? Do I borrow it? She grabbed it. Took it. If you take it away, then she will cry. It is her Teddy!

How much does forgiveness cost? Jesus offers it to us, holds it out to us. Take it, grab it! It is yours. Your sins are forgiven! You are set free!

How much does God's love and favour cost? Nothing! He is holding his hands out toward you: Come! Jump into my arms! I invite you to be mine!

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

The answer is: What is impossible with us humans God has made possible:

In Jesus's death he has broken the power of sin. In His resurrection he has conquered death, and Jesus says: I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full!

This is also the message of the epistle reading today from 1 John 5, 11-13: In Christ we have life!

This gift of life is free, but not cheap. It cost Jesus giving up everything. Firstly his glory as Son of God, to live amongst us for almost 30 years. The gospel reading from Luke 2,41-52 reflects on this - Jesus, God's son, obediently lives as Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and Joseph. At his trial Jesus gave up his dignity as human being when he was tortured, it cost him his friends, who all abandoned him. It cost him his heavenly Father, when at the cross he cried: Why have you forsaken me?

It cost him his life, when he died on the cross.

But to us it is free! It does not even cost a symbolic R 100.00, like the perfectly good car cost the young student. Jesus Christ offers it to us: Come, receive salvation like a little child!

But why does Jesus tell the rich man to sell everything and follow him? The rich man in the story wanted to add eternal life to his possessions. Of course it would be the most precious of his goods, and he was willing to pay for it, to pay a lot.

With his response Jesus makes it clear: Eternal life, being set free by Christ is not an additional quality that I possess - it is a new life! It is not new icing on an old cake - it is a new cake!

That is why, in John 3, he uses the image of a new birth for this event. Life starts at birth. When someone becomes a Christian, a new life begins.

The rich man wanted to add this to his life. Jesus says: Sell everything you have and follow me - becoming a Christian means to let go of everything, to grab hold of Jesus, to have a new foundation, purpose, calling in life!

Yesterday we spoke, amongst others, about Peter. When Jesus said to him and Andrew: Follow me - they left everything, their nets, their existence, and followed Jesus.

Being a Christian, a disciple, a follower of Jesus is not an additional qualification, or activity, or tradition to everything else that I have and am. Being a disciple is a fundamental change in life.

When, shortly before his death, a prostitute anoints the feet of Jesus with an expensive oil which was not only all her lives savings, but also her main tool

for the trade, she does not do it to get forgiveness and life, but she gives it because she **has received** forgiveness and a new calling in life.

How much did discipleship cost her? Nothing and everything. She received forgiveness for free. And then she gave up everything to follow this new calling in life!

When the pastor wanted to give the student his car, he knew that it would be appreciated more if the student had to pay for it - even if it was a ridiculously low price.

We tend to want to apply the same principle to eternal life: surely it cannot be completely free? Surely we must do something, pay something, give something to make us realise how precious it is?

But Jesus says: Receive it like a little child!

However, when we want to add it to everything we have, Jesus says: it cannot be added! It is a new beginning! It is not a nice finishing touch to your life - it is a fundamental change!

This afternoon we are going to look at a few examples of people who followed Jesus, and what it cost them.

It costs nothing to become a disciple, a child of God. But it might cost everything to be a disciple, to live as a child of God!

Just recently we heard in the news about the Groenewald Family, where Father and the two teenage children were murdered by the Taliban. The family had seen it as their calling to go and live in that country and live out the love of Christ. For this they were killed. The wife and mother, the only survivor, told about the deep shock when she came home to find the family killed. Asked whether she regrets that they ever went there, her reply was: I would do it again. We were called to serve God in this country. I am deeply saddened at the loss, but I would do it again!

Discipleship can cost everything I have - and yet, time and again people who had to sacrifice a lot will say: I'll do it again! Why? Because the reward is so great?

No, it is because the new life in Christ that they **have received** is so precious that they want to share it at all costs.

Amen

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