

Leaving All to Follow Jesus

By Kevin Moore

After Jesus' warning of the potential dangers of earthly riches, Simon Peter exclaims: "See, we have left all and followed you" (Mark 10:28). What did Peter mean by this lofty statement, what all did it entail, and what implications does it have for followers of Christ today?

When the Lord first called Simon Peter and his brother and companions, "they forsook all and followed Him" (Luke 5:11). Yet soon afterwards Jesus "entered the house of Simon and Andrew," where Simon's ailing mother-in-law was healed (Mark 1:29-31). Whatever was involved in leaving "all" to follow Christ, Simon Peter still kept his house (cf. John 20:10), his mother-in-law, and apparently his bride. In fact, years later the apostle Paul appeals to Peter's marital status as indicative of his own "right to take along a believing wife" (1 Corinthians 9:5). As a disciple of Jesus, therefore, Peter kept his marriage and family intact.

When Peter first became Christ's follower he also owned a fishing boat, which the Lord had used as a teaching platform (Luke 5:3). Later Jesus instructed his disciples to keep a small boat handy in case he needed it (Mark 3:9), and on another occasion he once again boarded a boat to teach (Mark 4:1-2). As the Gospel narrative continues, there are recurring references to "the boat," suggesting a particular vessel that was readily available for the Lord's use. The disciples took Jesus along in the boat (Mark 4:36) as they encountered a storm that required his miraculous intervention. Jesus sent his disciples ahead in the boat (Mark 6:45) and joined them by walking on the sea. Throughout his ministry he crossed the Sea of Galilee multiple times in the boat (Mark 5:2, 18, 21; 6:32; 8:10, 14). And after the Lord's death and resurrection, when Simon Peter decided to go fishing, he and others "got into the boat . . ." (John 21:3).

When Peter reportedly "left all" to follow Jesus Christ, he did not abandon his wife, his family obligations, his house, or presumably his boat (used often in the Lord's service). Therefore to fully appreciate the implications of Peter's statement in Mark 10:28, the surrounding context must be considered.

In Mark 10:17-22 Jesus had encountered a wealthy young ruler whose earthly riches were of greater value to him than heavenly treasure. The Lord's instruction to sell the material possessions and give the proceeds to the poor was not a universal pronouncement. Knowing this particular individual's heart and misplaced priorities, Jesus simply identifies what he needed to do to remove the

spiritual impediments in his life (cf. 9:43-48). No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24) and have one foot in the Lord's kingdom while keeping the other stubbornly planted in the world.

As Christ goes on to explain the extreme difficulty of the rich entering God's kingdom, the disciples are "astonished" (Mark 10:23-26a). Such a concept, so different from the rabbinic teaching that wealth is allegedly an indicator of divine favor, causes them to wonder, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 26b). The bottom line is, no one can be saved by human effort, achievement, or prosperity. The good news is, as Jesus affirms, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (v. 27).

Here is where Peter responds: "See, we have left all and followed You" (Mark 10:28). Nevertheless, as noted above, he had not given up his wife, his house, or his boat, not to mention his sandals, clothing, staff, sword, et al. (cf. Mark 6:8-9; John 18:10; Acts 12:8). Leaving all and following Jesus clearly does not call for physically impoverishing oneself. The fundamental requisite, then, is an inner detachment from earthly ties. This includes one's house, siblings, parents, spouse, children, and lands (Mark 10:29; cf. Matthew 19:29; Luke 18:29). In other words, absolute loyalty and commitment to the Lord Jesus ought to surpass one's connection to all earthly possessions and even the closest of human relationships.

If I own a house, it shall be considered the Lord's possession to be used for his purpose. If I have a vehicle, it will be readily available for God's work. If I have parents, they will be respected and cared for. If I am married, I will love and honor my spouse and promote heaven as our mutual destination. If I have children, they will be trained in Christ's service. If I have a job, I will work with diligence and integrity as to the Lord. If I have financial means, I will be generous in accordance with the divine will.¹¹ Consequently, with this kind of priority list, the resulting blessings are manifold – both "now in this time . . . and in the age to come" (Mark 10:30).

From a worldly perspective this may not make a lot of sense and is completely foreign to how sinful men operate. But seeing that "the world is passing away . . ." (1 John 2:17), we must put our complete trust in the Lord when he says: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37-39). What is more important to you than following Jesus and thereby leading your loved ones into eternity?