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Luke 14:25-33

“Follow Jesus No Matter the Cost”

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Imagine a set of scales. On one side of the scales are the great benefits of following Christ.

We can put things like baptism, Lord’s Supper, answered prayer, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and being adopted by God to be his child. There are many more things we can say, but let’s look at the other side of the scales. On this side we lay all of the difficulties that come with following Jesus. What are you putting there?

We need to think about God’s law. We have to give up our time to come to church. You may face persecution for your faith. Again there are many things we can put on the difficulties side. The truth is that most preachers and many Christians in general do not want to emphasize what it costs to follow Jesus. Everyone wants to make following Jesus the easiest thing in the world. Jesus was not like that though. He taught several times on what it means to be his disciple, and every one of those times Jesus gave his audience the impression that being his disciple was not easy. One time Jesus told someone that they could not go back to their home to say goodbye to their family before they set out physically to follow Jesus. Another time Jesus told his audience that they would have to drink his blood and eat his body to be his disciples. According to Jesus, discipleship is really difficult.

Our passage this morning is another “difficult saying” of Jesus. On the surface of the text, what Jesus is saying is rough and perhaps shocking. We should not try to immediately make Jesus’ words nice and polite. He was trying to shock the crowds following him. But he was also trying to teach his disciples what it means to be his follower.

Jesus said that following him would mean that you would have to take up a cross and follow him. Jesus said you would have to hate even your own life if you wanted to be his disciple. I think we can all say that is too much for us. Without trying to take the sting out of Jesus' words I want to take some time and try to understand what Jesus is saying and call us all to a life that is molded/shaped by the cross.

1. Luke 14:28-32 "A warning about counting the costs"

Before we look at what it means to follow Jesus, we should think about why it is important to do so. "The grass looks greener on the other side of the fence." Have you ever heard this phrase before? It is a popular saying where I come from. Its meaning is simple. The thing that you do not have but see from afar looks better than what you already have. So for a grazing animal like a cow, the cow eats grass all day in its own field, but it will stick its neck through the fence to eat the grass on the other side of the fence even though it is the same grass on either side of the fence. The people following Jesus at this point were likely comparing Jesus' teaching to that of the Pharisees and other religious leaders in Israel. Jesus' message about the coming Kingdom of God was enticing. Jesus had fed 5,000+ people at one time with a few fish and some bread. Jesus had healed the sick and driven out demons. He taught with wisdom and authority like no one else. So upon hearing his message the people were thinking that they wanted the life that Jesus had been talking about. Jesus warned them that there was a cost to following him, but he also gave them two object lessons to explain what he was saying.

First, Jesus says that if you try to follow him without considering the costs it would be like someone who starts building a tower without planning to see if there were sufficient resources to complete it. I can imagine someone facing the need for some defence for a small city or on a farm, and building a modest watchtower or guard tower to meet that need. In the earnest desire to see the project start, this person hires the laborers and starts accumulating the resources. Before you know it, a foundation has been laid and the first walls are going up, but there is a problem. There are only enough bricks to finish the first floor of the tower. Maybe the best thing to do would be to abandon the work, but that would be embarrassing so the laborers press on and finish as much of the tower as possible, but in the end there is just half a tower in plain sight for all to see and ridicule. The second example Jesus gives is a king going to war with another king. As is good military strategy, some report of the enemy's army is brought back to the king. The king realizes that his enemy has double the amount of soldiers. Upon hearing the report the king must consider a plan of action. If the king does not think he can win, the only thing he can do is send out messengers and ask for terms of peace. If the king does not send these messengers, a battle may mean that he will lose his entire kingdom and perhaps his life. The king and the tower builder have to examine the costs of their projects. Do they have what it takes to do the job? Are the benefits from the war or the tower good enough to justify the cost? Or to the point of Jesus' warning, is following Jesus worth what he says it will cost us?

2. Luke 14:25-27, 33 "Leave everything and take up a cross"

In the previous sections of Luke 14, Jesus was eating with a group of people that included some religious leaders called Pharisees. Jesus had recently healed a man on the Sabbath, and some of the religious leaders

were angry with him. As Jesus confronted these religious leaders he also taught about the nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus said that it was a place for the poor and needy, but that all kinds of people were invited to come into the kingdom of God. There is a strong rebuke for the religious leaders who thought that they were entitled to (that they deserved) a place in God's kingdom. The Apostle Luke changes the scene from Jesus eating and teaching around the table to Jesus being followed by great crowds. The scene and audience may have changed, but Jesus is still talking about the kingdom of God. Jesus is still confronting the false assumptions of his audience. The theme does pivot from who will be in the kingdom to what it costs to follow Jesus in the kingdom. We should take note that who will be invited to the kingdom and what it costs to follow Jesus are here in close proximity. All kinds of people will be invited, especially those that are poor and needy, but they cannot just come into the banquet without leaving something behind.

Jesus says that anyone who wants to follow him has to hate his father, mother, spouse, brother, sister, and even their own life (v. 26). When Jesus says that we must hate in order to be his disciples we are shocked. Jesus was the one that said his followers had to love their enemies and pray for them. But here in Luke 14, Jesus is saying that we have to hate our families. Hate is such a strong word, and here Jesus is using it for effect. The opposite of hate is love, right? So, if Jesus is saying that you ought to hate your father and mother, sister and brother, and even your own life, then what is he saying that we should love instead? In Luke 14, the author does not explicitly tell us who we should love rather than our families or ourselves, but in Matthew 10:37 we have a parallel account that does tell us who we should love.

Matthew 10:37 says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

When we read these two passages side by side I think we get a picture of what Jesus is saying when he says we have to hate our families and ourselves to be his disciples.

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" and "if anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother..." Jesus is making a stark contrast. In other words, compared to how much you love Jesus, it is as if you hate your father and mother. Loving Jesus may not sound too hard, but loving Jesus so much that it is as if you hate your family is almost overwhelming to think about.

Remember those scales I mentioned earlier? Think back to those benefits of following Jesus. Eternal life and forgiveness of sins are amazing gifts, but are those gifts worth loving Jesus so much that it is like we hate our family? Let's think about this some more. Do you remember the greatest commandment? Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. The little word "all" is the thing that makes this so hard. What do we ever do that is truly "all"? But Jesus says that we ought to love God with "all" our being. If you compare the command to love God with "all" we are, then everything else that calls for our love cannot reach the level of our love for the Triune God. Another issue we face in trying to understand loving God with all our being is trying to understand what love is. Loving God is not romantic

love, but a love that is best described in terms of obedience and devotion. Another good word for explaining this would be loyalty. To love God is to be totally loyal to him. To obey his commands. To seek God's honor and glory. The person who hates father and mother compared to the love they have for Jesus is completely devoted to the commands of God, and not even the commands of father and mother will claim his or her attention. If we think of love and hate in terms of loyalty then Jesus gets your complete loyalty even when it means going against what other people think or say. However, Jesus intensifies his words in verse 26 by adding that being Jesus' disciple means taking up the cross and renouncing all that you have in verses 27 and 33 (reread the verses).

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²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Taking up the cross is the real call to follow Jesus even to the death. The end of Jesus' road in the gospel of Luke is Jerusalem and the cross. It is the same for us as his followers. Death first and foremost to ourselves and our plans to be our own savior. We cannot be satisfied with the stuff in the world because we have seen the glory of Christ. Riches and fame, or even plain, ordinary living cannot give us what we really need. We renounce it all. Instead we take up the name of Jesus and live for his glory.

Now, we have talked about the costs of following Jesus. It will mean restructuring our entire lives around loyalty and obedience to God. Jesus was not making it easy on his audience. Now I do not doubt that you could tell me of the many ways that being a Christian has been a costly thing. Opportunities lost, ridicule, and perhaps even some physical harm. I pray that through those experiences you see that you are following in the footsteps of your Savior as you carry the cross and follow him. However, I want to close our time by drawing our attention to the deeper truth of giving our total devotion to Jesus. Love and hate seem like polar opposites. In fact they usually are. If I hate something I usually seek to avoid it or destroy it. But because we have said that Jesus is making a comparison using love and hate we are not being commanded to hate our families. We are being called to love Jesus so much that he gets all our allegiance. Even if it means that we go against the wishes of those around us, we will follow Jesus. So, what does total devotion and allegiance to Jesus bring about in your life? As we said earlier it brings about obedience to the commands of God and seeking his glory above all things. So practically speaking it means that you will also obey the second greatest commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. It means that you will honor your father and mother. It means you will serve those less fortunate than yourself. It means that you will tell the truth and treat all people as though they were created in God's image. Hating your father and mother, sister and brother, and even your own self seems harsh. Renouncing all that you have and taking up the cross also seems harsh. But the God who we love gives us all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places and

calls us to be the best and most admirable kind of people in the world. I suggest you take some time and think about Christian theology and ethics. The teachings of the Bible and church give deeper meaning to the values we want to uphold. For example, honoring parents because of traditions passed down from ancestors is not much of a reason for doing it. At some point people may choose to stop following a tradition. However, honoring your parents because God made the family and commanded that children honor their parents in the Lord gives it a higher purpose. Telling the truth because God always tells the truth makes the truth better. Every true thing that we utter, even when it may not give us an advantage, is a good true thing because God who never lies is our Father. Having God as our first love makes everything else in our lives more valuable. It makes everything precious. We can appreciate the changing seasons, savoring our favorite foods, the love of our family, and our work because by enjoying those things we point to the better things that are hidden in God. There is something counterintuitive about loving God first and seeing your love for other things increase. True godliness makes other things more precious and more beautiful rather than diminishing them.

We should give ourselves completely to the Triune God. It will cost us some things. We will have to repent of some things. We will have to seek the good of others rather than just our own good. The motivations we have for career and family life will be reordered. There will be many more things that change, shift, or we may leave behind, but there is a reason Jesus told us to count the cost of being his disciples. When we face loss of family, career, and maybe our lives we will be tempted to say that all this Jesus stuff isn't worth it. It may seem like it would just be easier if people didn't know that we were Christians. But remember Peter on the night Jesus was arrested. Peter was asked again and again if he was a follower of Jesus and he denied it three times. Why did he deny Jesus? Peter was with Jesus for all the miracles. He walked on water with Jesus, but he was afraid of what would happen to him if he said he were a follower of Jesus. However, after he saw the resurrected Christ and received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, he lived the rest of his life boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. I think we can say that the change is the result of two things: first, Peter saw and believed the power of God in Christ, and secondly, Peter compared that power with the fear he experienced that night Jesus was arrested. There is no comparison between the power of God and the power of the people around us. There is no glory higher or better than God's glory. Like Jesus did in Luke 14:25-33 when he called his audience to count the cost, I urge you to count the costs of following Jesus. Following Jesus will not be easy and it won't make every problem in your life go away immediately. It may cost you family, career, and even your own life. Are you willing to face difficulties and trials? Are you willing to live a life shaped by the cross? As we count the costs don't simply look at the problems, but at the deeper faith, hope, and love we receive from God. We look at how the cross makes us better people who can live and serve one another that is based on God's Word. Count the cost.....is following Jesus worth it?