

# Make Christ Lord, or Perish

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 14. I find [it] providential that this morning, at the beginning of the year, we come to literally the most demanding and difficult text in all of Luke. If you've been here a while, you know that's saying a lot. Everything is going to be downhill from this text. So, you can look forward to that.

R. Kent Hughes, in his commentary on Luke, tells us of a[n essay] by Annie Dillard, entitled *An Expedition to the Pole*. The [essay] is about what is commonly referred to as the Franklin expedition. The year was 1845 when Sir John Franklin and 138 other officers sailed from England in 3 different 3-masted ships. Their goal was to find a northwest passage across the Canadian Arctic to the Pacific Ocean. They traveled in these three ships, which had auxiliary steam engines, but only twelve days [worth] of coal. The reason for that is that they needed to make room for a 1,200-volume library, an organ, china for fine meals, and custom-made sterling silverware [with which] to eat. Even though the voyage was to be two to three years in length, they didn't take any warm clothing, only their officer's apparel. They left England with great fanfare. Two months later, a British whaling captain had reported seeing them in Lancaster Sound. He was the last person [who] had ever seen the voyagers alive.

Years passed, and people wondered what happened to the Franklin expedition. Eskimos told of stories long past of strange men in thin blue suits

pushing wooden boats across the ice. Some had seen them pushing and pulling these boats, and some thirty-five were seen trying to drag a boat across the frozen Starvation Cove. At another cove, called Terror Cove, thirty men were found dead in a tent that they had set up on the ice. At Simpson Strait, the three masts of a ship were seen protruding out of the ice, but the ship was totally engulfed. Two [men] were found frozen to death in a small boat [that] had been [dragged] some sixty-five miles over the frozen wasteland. The bodies of those found in the tent and in the boat were clutching custom-made silverware. Many miles south, an officer was found all by himself. He wore an officer's uniform, with nice little silk tassels hanging from the shoulder, gold buttons, [with] a black silk neckerchief around his neck. [He also had] some tea [with him].

The Franklin expedition perished because they had not prepared. They had not considered the cost. They went into this expedition as if it were going to be a pleasure cruise, as if they were going to be sitting around in their ships dining on fine food, and not encountering any real, serious weather. They [thought they] would just sail through this passage that they didn't even know existed, and come out on the other side, having read all 1,200 volumes in their library. But in the end, it cost them their lives because they didn't count the cost. They didn't prepare. They didn't consider what would happen to them on the journey.

Let's say that you are with several thousand people—a lot of people, far more than are in here this morning by ten or twenty, maybe. You're on a dirt road, somewhere in Perea. Perea is the area that is east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho, on the other side of the Dead Sea. You're following Jesus with these thousands of people in a dry, hot, arid place. Maybe you live in Perea and you heard that Jesus was coming, so you went to meet Him. Maybe you followed Him over the Jordan because you heard He was there. You've surely heard about His miracles. Maybe you've witnessed His miracles, maybe you've even followed Him before for a few days, and now here you are again following Him with this great multitude. You wonder if Jesus is the Messiah. It seems that He could be, but the religious leaders

say “no.” You’re amazed at His miracles, you’re enthralled by His teaching, you’re entertained by His arguments with the religious leaders, but you don’t know for sure [if He is the Messiah or not]. You just wonder, and you watch, and you follow along with the multitude.

Suddenly, as you’re going along the road from where you are to who knows where, Jesus stops, and everybody realizes Jesus is stopping. Jesus turns, and everybody hushes. They’re quiet because they want to see what He’s going to say, [to] hear it clearly, so everybody gets very still and very quiet. Then Jesus says this—follow along in your Bibles as I read Luke 14:25:

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, “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. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

In this text, Jesus gives you five proofs of discipleship that one must possess if [he is] going to be Jesus' disciple and not perish in hell.

The first: Hate your relatives or perish. Look at [Luke 14:]25: "Now large crowds were going along with Him." Jesus, again, is in Perea, He's moving from one village to the next. The crowd doesn't know where He's going, He's just going and they're following. They want to see a miracle, they want to see some amazing thing, or [hear] an amazing teaching, watch an amazing argument, whatever. The multitude in our text [is] like the multitude[s] in churches all around the world today—people who come into buildings where the church meets, yet they come for the wrong reasons. They come because maybe they want people to think they're Christians. There is a lot of peer pressure to be a Christian in some circles. You don't want to be thought of as a pagan, so you hang around the church in order for people to think that you're a Christian. Maybe you come to church because you want to drum up business, and that's really the only reason you put up with the sermons, the hand shaking, and all that. You just want to make money off of people. Maybe you come because your parents make you come. You don't really want to come, but they make you come, and you know in your heart that if you had it your way, you'd stay home and watch TV or play video games. Maybe you come because you're looking for a husband or for a wife. Or maybe you enjoy the preaching, and you enjoy the learning, but not the applying.

Look at [Luke 14:]25[-26]: "He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me. . . .'" This phrase "comes to Me" means "get saved, is born again, becomes a true Christian, a true disciple." We use the same phraseology. We say, "Hey, did you hear that so-and-so came to Christ?" What are we saying? "Have you heard that [he] came to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?" That's what we're saying. That's what Jesus means here: "If anyone comes to Me," that is, "If anyone comes to Me to be saved from the consequences of [his] sin."

Look at [Luke 14:]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.” Jesus often made shocking statements in order to get people to listen and think, and this is surely one of them. The word “hate” means “to detest, to intensely dislike.” Think about what Jesus is saying here. “Hate your father and mother, husband, wife, brother, sister, children? Are you sure? Or you cannot be My disciple?” Well, in certain contexts, like this one, the word “hate” can mean this: it can mean “to give preference to above all others.” See, whenever you have to choose between one person and another person, in that sense, you have to submit to this one and despise that one, show hatred toward [him]. That’s what Jesus is saying. He is saying: “You need to give Me preference above all others, and in that way showing hatred toward them by not submitting to them but submitting to Me.”

Jesus must come first, is what it means. Jesus says in Luke 16:13: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” You must choose [to] who[m] you will give preference. Will it be Christ, your wife, your children, or a friend? Who is it going to be? Only one person can be King, Master, and Lord of your life. Jesus says it must be Him.

In 1 Chronicles 28:9, David is on his deathbed, he’s about ready to die, so he calls Solomon in, and he wants to give Solomon some key little bits of knowledge before he passes into eternity. These are the words of a dying man to his son, who is now going to be king. This is what [David] tells Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:9:

As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.

That’s exactly what Jesus is saying here: “Are you going to give Me preference with a whole heart and a willing mind, or not?” [He] says, “If

you seek Me, you're going to find Me. If you reject Me, you will be forsaken forever." [That is] the same exact thing [as what is said in 1 Chronicles 28:9]. The question is, does that describe you? Are there any relationships that are getting in between you and Jesus? Jesus mentions all of our closest relationships here, doesn't He? You've heard the phrase, and I've seen it in action, "Blood is thicker than water." I've seen people who basically say, "I don't care what they've done. I don't care what the Bible says. I don't care what God wants them to do, I am not going to turn against my blood relations." Of course, they never state it that way, but that's exactly what they mean. "I *will not* confront [my family]. I *will not* obey the Scriptures toward them. I *will not* do it." That is to side with others and put them first before Jesus.

Jesus says, "If you do that, you can't be My disciple." He said it this way in Matthew 10:37: "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." Mothers, just look into the little cherubic face of your child, look to that wife [who] you love and cherish as Christ loves the Church, look to your husband, your children, your friends, whatever the closest, most dearest relationships you have, look at them, and ask yourself, "Would I follow Christ or them if I had to choose?" Well, you have to choose, and you have made a choice. The question is: What is it? Are you following Jesus, giving preference to Jesus above all others, or not? Your unbelieving spouse, your parents, your boss, your friend, doesn't want you to do some Christian fanatical thing. You know it's God's will, they don't want you to do it, [so] who are you going to cave in to? Who are you going to submit to? Jesus or them?

Jesus says, "If anyone is unwilling to hate all others in order to follow Me," look at the end of [Luke 14:]26: "he cannot be My disciple." [Jesus is saying], "He cannot be a true Christian, he cannot be somebody I have saved by grace. He is lost. He is perishing." What person do you suppose contends for dominance of your life more than any other person? Think about that. Who is it? [It is] that person you look at in the mirror. We are

our worst enemies. That's why Jesus says at the end of [Luke 14:]26: "Yes, and even his own life." The Greek literally reads: "Even his own soul." You have to be willing to hate your own soul or you cannot be Christ's disciple.

William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Luke, writes:

When an alien wishes to become a citizen of the United States of America he must renounce allegiance to his native land and take an oath of loyalty to the country of his choice. This does not mean that he cannot continue to think highly of the nation to which he has said farewell, but it does mean that from now on, he must serve "the land of the free and the home of the brave." Even far more absolutely and unconditional must be the loyalty which citizens of the kingdom of God sustain towards their heavenly country and its "Lord of lords and King of kings." If a person is unwilling to tender that unconditional devotion, then, says Jesus, "He cannot be my disciple."<sup>1</sup>

We, like Eve, like to be our own gods. Do you remember, "Hey, if you eat this fruit, you will be like God."

[Eve says], "OK, I'll take it" [see Genesis 3:1–7].

We like to be our own god. I mean, when you think about it, that is really at the core of everything we do that is against God. It's being our own god. Why do people commit immorality? [It is] because they don't want to submit to Christ's standards of purity. Why is it that [people] would engage in evil business practices? [It is] because they don't want Christ ruling their [lives] and business[es]. Why do people worry? [It is] because they don't believe Christ is sovereign and will take care of them. Why is it that people are unwilling to sacrifice to read the Scriptures, to study the Scriptures, and to be knowledgeable about the Word of God? [It is] because they don't want to submit to Christ and have Him ruling their lives and telling them what to do. It all comes down to idolatry—self-worship.

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, *Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), n.p.

[Do] you remember what happened when Saul was told by Samuel that the Lord wanted him to totally wipe out Amalek, to destroy the king and all the plunder, take nothing, [and] just wipe them out [see 1 Samuel 15:1–23]? Saul spares some. So, Samuel confronts him, and says, “Saul, why didn’t you obey the Lord?”

He says, “I did obey the Lord.” In the background you hear this, “Baa. Moo.”

“Saul, what is that I hear, those animals?”

He [says], “Oh, those! Well, we spare[d] those to offer sacrifices to the Lord.”

“What about the king?”

“Oh. . . .”

Then, Samuel says this in 1 Samuel 15:23. Listen to what he says: “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.” Did you see that? Did you see [that] to reject the word of the Lord is to practice divination and idolatry? It’s not that Saul was worshipping some wooden statue, stone idol, or some pagan deity. He merely refused to submit to God, and in refusing to submit to God, he was committing self-worship—idolatry.

Paul says the same thing in Colossians 3:5. Listen to this: “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.” In other words, if you’re involved in immorality, if you’re impure, if you have evil passions and evil lusts that you’re seeking to fulfill, if you’re greedy—all of [those] are just expressions of self-worship: idolatry. It’s a refusal to let Jesus be Lord of your life. Jesus requires that *He* be Lord, and *He* be worshipped, and *He* be the Master of your will, intentions, and all that is about you. If you are unwilling to have Him be this way in your life, you *cannot* be His disciple, He says.

Second: You need to die to self or “perish.” Look at [Luke 14:]27: “Whoever does not carry his own cross.” Now, the people who heard this,



they knew what a cross was. It was a crude instrument of execution. We have pretty distorted views of what crosses are. We think they're jewelry. They're earrings and things you put around your neck as little tokens of "I'm a Christian." To them, it was a hideous form of execution that made the dying process prolonged and sustained so it would be the most painful for the longest amount of time. We see pictures of those crosses, where Jesus is way up above the ground. [In actuality, however], the people who were crucified, their feet were just a foot above the ground. They were low. People were right there. Salvation was all around them. The closeness of having stability, the closeness to the ground, the nails, the slow bleeding, the slow starvation, the slow suffocation—it was like hideous. So, when Jesus [said], "Whoever does not carry his own cross," there surely was a gasp in that great multitude. "Carry his own cross? You mean die? March to your own death?"

You [may] hear somebody say, "Well, we all have our crosses to bear"—a contentious wife; stubborn, mean-spirited husband; unreliable car; mother-in-law. That's not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is stating in our text in a negative way what He stated positively in Luke 9:23, where He says: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." The phrase literally means [that Jesus is saying], "You need to die to yourself, march to the death of yourself, so that *I* can be Lord of you, not you," which means you may have to say "no" to your hobby sometimes, or all the time. You may have to say "no" to sleeping in sometimes, or all the time. You may have to say "no" to your day off and instead serve somebody else, or say "no" to friends, or "no" to family, or "no" to children, or a husband, or a wife. Why? [It is] because you are a soldier of Jesus Christ. You're on duty twenty-four hours a day. He is the master, the chief, the one who is in charge of you. He tells you what to do.

Your parents say, "Hey, listen, I know that you're in the Marines and stuff, but couldn't you just stay home a few more days on Christmas vacation?"

“No, I’ve got to go.” Why? Because your commander-in-chief is calling and you have to submit, [that’s why].

Notice in the middle of [Luke 14:]27, Jesus says: “And come after Me.” Notice He doesn’t say, “Whoever does not carry his own cross.” In other words, it’s not just a cross bearing, but it is a cross bearing and following. It’s not just acknowledging, “You know, I probably should die to myself. I probably should make Jesus Lord of every area of my life.” It’s not just an acknowledging. It’s also a following after. You know, I find myself, and maybe you find this, sometimes I delude myself into thinking that I’m obeying the Lord because I know what’s right to do. All of a sudden, you realize, “I’m not obeying here. I just *know* what’s right to do.” I find myself thinking, “You know, I need to pray about somebody.” Well, just pray about him. Pray. Don’t just think about praying sometime, pray about it. Why not do it right then? Sometimes we deceive ourselves into thinking that because we know what’s right, and we know what’s true, therefore we are following Jesus. No, knowing just makes us more accountable. It’s the doing that is the following after.

We sang it earlier. I didn’t know we were even going to sing that song, but obviously there was providence. “Jesus, I my cross have taken, All to leave and follow Thee.” Do you hear that? “All to leave and follow Thee.”

Destitute, despised, forsaken,  
Thou from hence my all shalt be.  
Perish every fond ambition,  
All I’ve sought, and hoped, and known.  
Yet, how rich is my condition:  
God and heaven are still my own!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Henry F. Lyte, “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken,” *Voices in Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2003), #296.

That needs to be it. Those are the words of somebody who has arrived at the discipleship place in their life, [who] has really been saved by grace. Look at the end of [Luke 14:]27. If they aren't willing to do that, if they aren't willing to die to self, you cannot be Jesus' disciple. You can't be a true Christian. You're not saved.

Three: Count the cost or perish. Picture in your mind, here, the faces of this great multitude. They probably looked like your faces right now. Whoa! Think about this. This huge multitude, they've sacrificed, right? They've left wherever they lived, they're following Jesus to who knows where. They're on this big road, right? Jesus stops, the crowd hushes. There are several thousand of them. Jesus says, "All you [have] to do is hate all your blood relations. All you [have] to do is hate your own soul. All you [have] to do is die to self, crucify yourself, or you can't be My disciple." What do you think is going through their minds at this point? Surely they're thinking, "Whoa! If I did that, I would have to..." fill in the blank. We can all fill in the blank. We all know that if following Jesus meant that, then we're going to have to fill in the blank, and we're going to have to leave, forsake, give up, whatever it is to follow Jesus.

Jesus knows this. Look at [Luke 14:]28[-30]:

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish."

Your friends see you clearing a lot, and you tell everybody in town, "I'm building a tower in the corner of my field so I can watch over my property." They see you clear the lot, dig trenches, big foundation stones are brought in. You set them in place, and pretty soon, construction stops, workers disappear, and they're wondering, "Yeah, you must be getting some more materials." Then the materials never come. The weeds grow back, the

dust blows in, and pretty soon, your friends are walking by, and they look at your “tower,” and they [say], “Oh, there’s so-and-so’s ‘tower’ that he built. Ha ha ha.” They mock you. Why? [It is] because they all know that you started to build, and were what? [You were] unable to finish because you didn’t consider the cost.

If that isn’t enough, look at [Luke 14:]31[-32]:

Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

Going to battle is a little different than building a tower. Both of these illustrations, these parables, teach the necessity of counting the cost, but building a tower is no big deal. If you even start early and you weren’t able to finish, and you didn’t have the money because you didn’t count the cost, you’d have a foundation and people would laugh, [but] that’s all you’d have to pay. This is a whole different thing. This king has somebody coming against him. Battle is a life or death situation. He has to decide right now, and make a thorough calculation. The other side has twice as many men, twice as [much] cavalry, twice as [much] artillery, and he needs to decide whether he’s going to go to battle with bombs and bullets, or whether he’s going to send a delegation to try to get peace with words instead. The latter is probably what he would choose. But the whole point here is that if he went into battle and he didn’t count the cost, it would be disastrous. So it is with those who go through this life merely following Jesus physically, but not spiritually.

“Oh, I’ll come to church. I’ll give some money. I’ll do a few little things and tell people I’m a Christian and that’s it.” Those are like the people on the road. I’ve known people who came to church, who were very excited for a time. I actually thought they were saved. They had me fooled. They were

even baptized. They gave great testimony and told of how God opened their eyes and delivered them from sin. They were excited and involved, and it seem[ed] like they were everywhere in the church for a while. Everybody [knew] them. Pretty soon, they show[ed] up less and less, and pretty soon a year [went] by, and [someone asked], "Have you seen so-and-so?"

"I haven't seen him in a long time."

"Yeah, he dropped his membership six months ago."

Think about Judas. Judas lived with Jesus for three years, saw Him do all the miracles, heard Him teach and preach, saw all of that and then what did [Judas] do? He sold [Jesus] out. He betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver—the Lord of Glory for thirty pieces of silver. Thirty pieces of silver was more important to Judas than Jesus. What does that tell you about Judas? He loved money. He loved a little money more than [he did] Christ. Think about Demas, the disciple, travelling companion and co-minister with the Apostle Paul. Mentioned in Colossians 4:14 and Philemon [1:]24, he sends his greetings with Paul to different churches when Paul writes letters. You think, "This guy is squared away. He's with the Apostle Paul, he's got all the knowledge, he's gone through all [of] this ministry, he's seen all these things happen. Surely this guy is squared away." But what does Paul say, when he is dying, when he's in the Mammertine prison, when he is about to be executed, and he writes the short book of 2 Timothy, and sends it off to Timothy, who is in Ephesus. He writes this in 2 Timothy 4:10, these are some of the last words he ever penned before he died: "For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Oh! Demas realized, "You know what? This Christianity thing is getting too hot. Too many Christians are being persecuted. The Apostle Paul is going to die for his faith. What am I doing here? I need to go back to my lord—the world, and its pleasures." So he [left] Paul and blend[ed] back into the world and its pleasures only to lose everything in the end.

[Do] you remember the two kinds of seed in the parable of the soils [see Matthew 13:3–9]? [There were] the seed[s] sown among the weeds and the rocky soil. Both of those seeds seem[ed] to sprout up, and they

were doing really [well], and they seem[ed] to have promise, and then what happen[ed]? The worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, [and] persecution choke[d them] out so [they became] unfruitful. They never bore a single bit of fruit. Like Demas, there are those who have departed having loved this present world more than Christ. Sometimes [I] run into them around town. I'll see them, and I know they used to go to Calvary, and I know they were excited for a time, and I know they fell back, and fell away, and fell into their sin, or whatever. They are always kind of nervous [when they talk to me]. They talk in kind of nervous tones, and their eyes kind of dart back and forth, and they won't look [me] in the face. They've always got to be going somewhere when [I] run into them. They are like Lot's wife—they looked back [see Genesis 19:26]. Being a disciple means first counting the cost, and then being willing to pay the bill of whatever it takes to follow Jesus.

Four[th]: We need to give up all or perish. Jesus has gone after relationships, [saying], "Every blood relation, and your own soul: give it up. Count the cost." Not only that, look at [Luke 14:]33: "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." [Jesus is saying], "Oh, yeah, I want everything you have, too." The phrase "give up" means "to renounce, to take leave of, to say goodbye to." Jesus is saying, "[If] you want to be My disciple, you've got to kiss everything goodbye." This is a terrifying phrase if you're an American and you've never been on a missions trip to a third-world country. You haven't seen people living in little tin shacks, with dirt floors, no water, and no electricity. You haven't really come to grips with just how blessed, rich, and spoiled you are. You go into a grocery store [in one of those third-world countries], and there [are] little packages of things in brown wrappers, and that's their "super market." Jesus says, "I want you to be willing to walk away from your house, to live in that small apartment or tin shack. I want you to be willing to lose your car and take the bus or walk. I want you to be willing to give up those antiques, knick-knacks, heirlooms, and things destined to perish if I want to use them. If you don't want to do that, you can't be My disciple."

Jesus isn't saying, "Listen, I want you to take a vow of poverty. Let's all leave here today, give away everything, and go live in the gutter with each other." He's not saying that. He's saying [that] you need to be willing to take everything you have and put it on the altar of sacrifice to Christ, and if He wants to use it, then let Him take it. I think that the greatest and probably one of the most convicting texts on this is Hebrews 10:34, where the author of Hebrews praises his Hebrew readers, and he says this: "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one." Think about that.

When the author of Hebrews is writing to his readers, he says, "I know some of you have lost everything because you followed Christ. Some of you have had all of your possessions plundered. You are dirt poor." But you know what's amazing is [that] he praises them because though they were Christians and had lost everything for the cause of Christ, they visited their friends who were in prison because they were Christians. That takes some courage. To know that Christians are being persecuted, to know they're being thrown into prison, to be a Christian yourself, and to go visit somebody who is in prison for the very thing you are outside of prison. That takes faith and courage. That's exactly what they were doing. They were willing to risk imprisonment for the cause of Christ, and to be an encouragement to those who had already been imprisoned, so they could have a future glory in heaven with Christ.

Let's say that things in America continue like they're going. Let's say that Christianity is more and more persecuted. You can pretty much be any religion you want except Christianity because we're dangerous. We're narrow-minded. We're homophobic, or alcohol-phobic, or immorality-phobic, or whatever you want to call it. We've got so many phobias that we're trying to destroy other people. We actually believe in disciplining our children. All this is bad and evil. Soon it's determined that Christians are a nuisance to society, and they need to be gotten rid of. So, we begin to fall prey to evil men. One of the reasons we fall prey to them is they want

our stuff. They want our car, our house, the money in our bank accounts, so they swindle us, they rob us by force, whatever it is. They just plunder us. Let's just say at the end of all this, there you are on the street, only with the clothes on your back, and not very good clothes at that. You want to work, but no one will hire you because you're a Christian. Well, that's what happened to these believers [in Hebrews], and what's amazing is that little phrase: "and they joyfully accepted it." Joyfully accepted being plundered and imprisoned for Christ.

You may be thinking to yourself, "I'm glad we don't live in those times." Yes, we do. In countries where Muslims, Hindus, or Communists are still in control, Christians are suffering the exact same thing today in different parts of the world. If you don't know that, you need to quit reading just the liberal news. Get *Voice of the Martyrs* or whatever. Listen to what's really happening as people are losing all to follow Jesus. That's what it means to be His disciple. Those who are not willing to have that cannot be His disciple, Jesus says.

Fifth: Make an impact or perish. Look at [Luke 14:]34: "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned?" Salt is great because you season food with it. It makes food taste better. If you're on one of those special high-blood-pressure diets, you wish you could season your food so it tastes better. But that's good. Salt also preserves. So, salt has these two key functions. But their salt was different than our salt because their salt was taken a lot of times from around the southern end of the Dead Sea, where the very salty waters of the Dead Sea leech out and the salt rises to the top, and it's very crystalline, sparkly, and white. You can see it. The problem is, when you go down there to collect salt, you can't really tell by looking at it if it's pure or not. Since the trip down to the southern end of the Dead Sea was some twenty-plus miles, it would probably take you two days at least walking in the hot sun—probably three days. It's very hot down there, very arid, nothing grows because of all the salt and alkali, and you gather all of this salt up, and carry it back to use. The problem is [that] salt attracts moisture to itself, and so over the course of time,



if you tried to store a lot of salt, the salts would leech out and leave you this gypsum, alkaline powder. It would be salt that had “lost its saltiness.” There was no way to introduce salt back into that. You wouldn’t really want to.

So what do you do with this salt that has lost its saltiness? Well, you don’t want to put it in the soil or put [it] in the manure pile to till into the garden because it actually ruins the soil. It is really worthless for anything but for road base. So you just throw it outside your house to be trampled underfoot. What’s really interesting is this phrase “becomes tasteless,” that’s how the New American Standard Bible has it, or “has lost its taste,” or “has lost its flavor,” as the New King James or the English Standard version[s have] it. The Greek literally reads “has become moronic.” Think about that. Have you ever picked up your salt shaker, and said, “You moron!”? Think about that. “You’re so foolish.” We think, “Well, why would Jesus speak of salt that way? Salt isn’t stupid, foolish, or wise. What is He talking about?” Remember, He’s using salt here to represent people, and people *are* foolish, stupid, and moronic. They do things that are very unwise. They fail to impact the world for Christ. They are created to give God glory. They’re created to live for God, to display God, to be the light of the world [see Matthew 5:14], and the salt of the earth [see Matthew 5:13]. That’s what they’re created for. We’re all created for that purpose, and if you’re not serving that purpose, it’s stupid, it’s foolish, it’s moronic. You are like salt that has lost its saltiness.

Look at [Luke 14:]35: “It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out.” Once you’ve just become gypsum and alkali, you don’t want to put that on your food, in your garden, or anything else. You just pitch it. People who are not letting their light shine before men, who are no longer the salt of the earth, who are like the barren fig tree that was planted that we learned about earlier in Luke [13:6–7], that was planted in the vineyard but never produced figs. It’s worthless. Why would you have a fig tree that produced no figs? Why would you have salt that produced no saltiness? You would cut down the tree, you would throw out the salt. Why? [You would do so] because it is worthless. That’s the whole point.

There comes a time in your life when you need to come to Jesus. You need to follow after Christ. There's a fork in the road. Are you going to follow Jesus or are you going to follow the world? Are you going to follow Jesus, or are you going to follow your wife, your husband, your sister, your brother, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, [whoever or] whatever it is? Who are you going to follow? Will it be Jesus or someone else? Will it be Jesus or *something* else? If you choose the wrong way, Jesus says, "Moron. Stupid. Fool."

Then, at the very end, look at [Luke 14:]35: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Hear what? Hear [that] if you don't give Jesus preference over all other relationships you cannot be His disciple. Hear that if you are unwilling to die to self, to live for Christ, you cannot be His disciple. Hear that you must count the cost before coming to Jesus or you'll end up like Demas or Judas. Hear that if you are not willing to give up all you have, and not merely claim to be a Christian, but to pick up your cross and follow after Jesus, to be salt that actually makes an impact on the world, light that shines in the world, you cannot be His disciple and you're just like the multitude that is following Jesus [in our text]. Jesus is eternally serious in this text. I am sure all of that multitude was sitting there, [thinking], "Wow!" just like some of you are thinking right now, "Wow!"

You may be thinking of your life, "Listen, I am still a sinner." Jesus is not talking about becoming sinless. He's talking about coming to the place in your life where you are willing to give up all to follow [Him]. Every Christian who actually gets saved says, "You, Lord. Whatever You want from me, I will do it." It doesn't mean they become instantly sanctified. The rest of our [lives], we're battling, trying to conform to the commitment we've made to follow Jesus.

Let's say you're out and about, and you see one of those people with those little mongrel dogs, those little, energetic, ill-trained dogs, and it's on the leash. You know what I'm talking about. [It's one of those dogs] that you see coming down the sidewalk, and you want to cross over because it's [panting] and [running] all over. The dog is running around. It's

in the bushes getting tangled, it's wrapping itself around the pole, it's running backwards, it's running forward. But what happens? By a miracle, the owner, the master, gets that dog down that straight sidewalk, doesn't he? That's how it is being a Christian, a true disciple.

You commit, "OK, Lord, I want to go down the straight sidewalk," and then you run off into the bushes, and wrap yourself around the pole, you run backward, you run forward. Your whole life you're just all over the place. God has the leash of grace around your neck, and He's [saying], "Come here," and He keeps reeling you in. "All right, down this way," reel in, "Down this way," reel in. [This happens for ] your whole life. We're not talking about sinless perfection.

If you're sitting out there, thinking, "Well, I'm not sinless so I can't be a disciple," don't think that. What we're talking about is overall trajectory. What is the course of your life? [To whom] are you trying to submit? Are you farther down the sidewalk than you were when you supposedly first got saved? If you're just wrapped in the brush, you can't be one of His. If you're permanently entangled around the pole, you can't be one of His. If you're running in the wrong direction, you're not His. But if you see some progression there, if God's grace and mercy has you, and He's taking you from one point to the next, and He's perfecting what He started in you, then praise God.

There are two primary ways to look at this text. Whenever I come to a text like this, I usually begin with some disclaimers, some exceptions, some explanations because I don't want you to all sit there and feel uncomfortable like I'm preaching works salvation, because I'm not. But then I thought to myself, "You know, Jesus didn't do that." I even gave you explanations. I didn't say, "You just need to hate everybody you love," and then continue on. At least I explained it, OK? But Jesus didn't. Why would Jesus say all of these things that are so forceful and so hard, one after another, after another, after another, and not explain anything, and not explain anything after that, and then keep walking down the road?

This is why: All of those people who were following Jesus thought that they were going to make it to heaven because they were on the road, they were Jews, they were the people of Abraham, and of course they were going to heaven. That was the prevailing thought. Jesus want[ed] them to know: “Heritage doesn’t save you. Abraham doesn’t save you. Following behind Me, longing to see Me do miracles, to feed thousands, to cast out demons, to heal the sick, [to] say amazing things, and [to] refute the religious leaders doesn’t save you. There is only one thing that saves you.”

Jesus is not talking about earning your salvation. He’s not saying, “You have to hate your relations, die to self, give up your possessions, count the cost, and be salt that’s salty, and if you don’t do those things, you can’t earn your salvation.” That would be heresy. That would be salvation by works. He’s not describing how to become a Christian. He is describing what a Christian is and does as the normal pattern and trajectory of [his] life. So, why would He say that? So that those multitudes, and so that we who are here today, who look at our lives, and say, “That’s not me. That’s not me. That’s not me,” will stop, and say, “I need Jesus.” That’s why. “I need to be saved by grace. I need to believe that He died on the cross for me, that He shed His blood for me, that He was buried for me, and rose again on the third day for me, and that if I place my faith in Him, He will save, He will grab on to me, He will put the leash of grace around my neck and drag me down the straight and narrow.” That’s why He is saying it. He is trying to bring us all to a place of self-examination so we realize [that] this is what it means to be a disciple. This is what it means. If we look at our lives, and say, “That’s not it, that’s not it, that’s not me,” then we’ll say, “Then I must need Jesus. I must believe in Jesus and trust Him by faith.”

That’s the whole message here. He wants us all to feel the weight of discipleship in order that we evaluate our lives because there are so many people in so many churches, and so many cultures around the world who think they’re saved but are not. Jesus says all these shocking things, and you know what? There are some here today who have walked away from some pretty cushy jobs because they had to follow Jesus. [There are] some

here today who walked away from some incredible money and business deals because they had to follow Jesus. [There are] some here today whose husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, or parents are angry at them because they're choosing to follow Jesus. You know what I'm talking about. You're [thinking], "I've done that. I've suffered a little." That's it. But if you look at your life, and say, "You know what? That's not me. That's not me. I'm not following Jesus. I'm not giving Jesus my all. He's not Lord of my life. Yeah, I come to church. Yeah, I put some money in the plate. Yeah, I sometimes serve, and rarely read my Bible, but I do a little." You're just deluded.

Jesus said in Luke 14:24, which is the passage right before this one. Remember, He is invited into the Pharisee's house and there are all these other scribes and Pharisees there, and He tells them a parable about the great dinner feast, and at the end He says this in verse 24: " 'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.' " He's trying to get all these religious leaders to know, "You're not going to enter into the kingdom of heaven until you come to grips with Me." It's the same thing He's doing here [in our text], but now to the multitude. It's the same thing as saying, "None of you can be My disciple who is not willing to do this," so that they all go, "Well, then, I need [to be] saved because I'm not doing that." It's not that doing that saves you, it's that grace makes you like that.

If a cold chill is running up your spine right now, and you're thinking, "Man, you're scaring me. You're making me feel like I'm not saved," I hope so. Get saved again, if you need to. Some people say, "I've prayed so many times to receive Christ." Good. There's nothing wrong with that. Keep praying. What's bad is if you're not saved and you won't come to grips with Christ. What's bad is when you keep living in delusion, or you know you're not saved, and yet you won't do anything about it because of your pride, because of your love of the world, your love of sin, your love of your job, your hobby, or whatever it is, and that keeps you from Christ. Don't do that. Whatever you do, do not do that. The whole text here is this huge bludgeoning of hard demands, like five blows with a hammer, so we'll all stop, and say, "OK, where am I with the Lord?"

Is your cry:

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.  
Foul, I to the fountain fly.  
Wash me, Savior, or I die!<sup>3</sup>

Or, something else? Like, “I’m a pretty good person. I’ve never robbed anybody. I’ve never, you know. . . I’m not an axe murderer. Not yet, anyway.” Does your faith believe:

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains.<sup>4</sup>

You’re thinking, “That’s me. I’ve jumped in.” We have people here who were just so hopelessly addicted to drugs, alcohol, and pornography, and things that you would just think, “There is no hope for that person.” Now they’re clean. Why? [It is] because of Christ, because they placed their faith in Christ and Christ’s grace is sufficient for them. You know, people, I don’t even like the addiction terms. Everybody [says], “Well, so-and-so is addicted to” whatever. It’s like, “Everybody is addicted to sin before they come to Christ. We’re all ex-addicts.”

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<sup>3</sup>Augustus M. Toplady, “Rock of Ages,” *Voices in Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2003), #275.

<sup>4</sup>William Cowper, “There Is a Fountain,” *Voices in Worship*, #151.

Somebody comes to me, [and says] “Well, Pastor Hughes, I need to tell you,” it’s like I’m a priest and they need to confess.

“OK, go ahead and tell me what you did.”

[I say], “Yeah, yeah,” and they kind of look at me like, “Is this going to shock you?”

“Shock me, pal? Listen, I’m worse than you are. This whole church is full of ex-whatevers, and then those who are still enslaved to it because they haven’t come to Christ.” That’s it. Those are the two. You either have been saved by grace through faith to walk in newness of life [see Romans 6:4], or you have not. You are either a new creature in Christ now [see 2 Corinthians 5:17], it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you, and the life that you now live you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself up for you [see Galatians 2:20], or not. And so, is your cry now:

Jesus, I my cross have taken,  
All to leave and follow Thee.  
Destitute, despised, forsaken,  
Thou from hence my all shall be.<sup>5</sup>

Or not? If you want it really simply, you can have J.H. Sammis’ words:

But we never can prove  
The delights of His love  
Until all on the altar we lay;  
For the favor He shows  
And the joys He bestows  
Are for them who will trust and obey.

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<sup>5</sup>Henry F. Lyte, “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken,” *Voices in Worship*, #296.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus,  
[But to trust and obey.]<sup>6</sup>

That's it. That's the message Jesus has in this text. All this bludgeoning is to shock [the multitude] out of their complacency, to make them look at their lives, and to say, "Do I know Christ or not? Am I on the path or not?" If they're not, [He is encouraging them] to get on the path, which is by believing in Jesus and trusting in what *He* did to save [them]. If you're out there this morning, and you don't know Christ, I'm going to pray right now. You're going to have an opportunity right now to get on the straight and narrow, and to get the leash of grace around your neck. Let's pray.

Father, we just thank You for this great passage, which, though very hard and very demanding, is yet also very clear. We all need to look at our lives [and] ask ourselves if we have been willing to forsake all, are we those who have denied ourselves, taken up our cross[es], those who have counted the cost, those who are making an impact on this world, [who] are salt and light? [We know we are] not as much as we should be, but we want to, and we're working on it by Your grace. Father, if there are some here, and I know there are, who don't know You, who have never [seen] themselves as foul, and flying to the fountain of Christ so that they might be washed in His blood, and have never laid all on the altar in order to trust and obey, I pray right now that your Holy Spirit would move, that You would grant them the repentance they need to turn from their sin to embrace Jesus Christ, to believe in Him, to trust in Him alone for salvation. And that, doing that, You would give them great peace and comfort. For the rest of us, may we leave here today remembering what Jesus' gospel is, how Jesus proclaimed the truth to those who were in need, and may we do likewise as we seek to be salt and light in this world. And, Father, we pray all of these things in Christ's name, Amen.

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<sup>6</sup>John H. Sammis, "Trust and Obey," *Voices in Worship*, #347.



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