

The Fine Print of Discipleship

July 14th, 2013

Luke 14:25-35

²⁵Now 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. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple...³³So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

I assume most of you are familiar with the concept of "reading the fine print" (they put in very small print the info. that's most crucial for you to know, so you're ill-prepared to make a wise decision). Maybe many of you've been burned by not reading the fine print. You booked a hotel room, \$89.99, only to spend the night, receive the bill, and find that you owe \$129.99. "Yes, well, there was a tax for this purpose, a service charge because of that, there's actually a small fee for booking a room on the second Thursday of March, that's our policy..." You've got to read the fine print, so you're not suckered into something without being fully aware of the terms or conditions of the agreement.

As we look at this very challenging, sobering passage in Luke 14, I think we might say in some ways that this is Jesus giving us the "fine print" of discipleship. This is a pretty huge text on understanding what it means to be Jesus' disciple, and notice here that Jesus is ruthlessly committed to making sure we read and reckon with the fine print. There's no bait and switch, no playing games, with Him. No, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened..." and then later, after some have committed, "Oh, did I mention there's a cross involved?"

So let's see what this text tells us about, first, the cost of discipleship, second, the need for counting the cost, and third, the Christ we're to come after.

The Cost of Discipleship

So let's consider, first, the cost of discipleship. That this passage is about what it means to be a disciple is clear from the repetition of the words, "cannot be my disciple". And what comes before these words in each verse helps us to understand what it means to be a disciple, and just how costly it is:

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."*

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

So, what's the cost of discipleship? It doesn't take a seminary degree to figure this one out, it costs *everything!* It is the commitment of the whole life, the renouncing of the whole life -- your self, your family, your stuff -- and subordinating all of that to the Kingship of Jesus. This is why we talk about a disciple as someone who is learning how to bring every aspect of life in submission to Jesus.

This is very extreme language, right? What are the implications of Jesus using execution as a metaphor for what it means to follow Him and be one of His disciples? Because we tend to hang a cross around our neck or we see it every Sunday when we walk in here, we need to be careful not become desensitized to what the cross would have meant to the people who heard Jesus saying this.

A person carrying a cross was a dead man walking. It was a person who had been convicted of a crime and condemned to die, and that walk with the cross would have been humiliating and shameful. You'd carry it to the place of crucifixion, and the authorities would strip you naked, or nearly naked, and they'd nail your hands and feet to the cross, hanging you up there, gathering around, making fun of you as you

suffocated to death. It might take days to happen, sweating and bleeding and incontinent, weeping, with your own tears and blood and feces and urine dripping off your body into a pool beneath you. That's what it meant in that day to bear a cross; not put on a piece of jewelry.

And to hate your family, and even your own life. Most of you understand what He means by that, but it's worth clarifying. Clearly Jesus does not want us to break the ten commandments, and if He calls us even to love our enemies, it would be very odd for Him to command that we literally hate the people who are closest to us. "Hate" here has the sense not of hating actively, but hating comparatively (cf. Genesis 29:30-31, Matthew 10:37-38). All those other relationships -- precious as they are -- and even your own life, has now become rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus as King.

And Jesus says right up front, to all the crowds, if you want to be with Me, it's going to involve you carrying a cross. It's going to involve you hating what is most precious to you, subordinating all of that to your allegiance to me. From now on, what honors Me, what pleases Me, what I want for you, what I command of you, will take precedent over everything in your life. From now on, you're an owner of nothing, and a steward of everything. No conditions, no if's, no exceptions.

I could go on, but I think you get the picture. The point is that this is not an addition to add something on to your life. This is a call to die to your life as you know it, and live an entirely new life.

Do you see what I mean that there is no "fine print" with Jesus? This is not advanced Christianity; this is basic, entry-level discipleship. The repetition of "anyone", "whoever", and the fact that these words are addressed to "great crowds" all indicate that there is no other way than this to relate to Jesus.

In fact, He says if you try to align yourself with Jesus without coming to Him on these terms, you're like saltless salt; you're good for nothing, you're worthless to Him, and you'll simply be thrown away (v.34-35).

Counting the Cost

For those of you sitting here who have not come to Jesus for salvation, who don't regard yourself as Christians, understand that this is what's involved. Jesus is not a salesman; He's not trying to deceive you into making a commitment to Him without knowing all the fine print. But I'm really burdened today for those of you who do regard yourself as Christians, but it's very possible that you've never really reckoned with this invitation of Jesus to come and die.

While there are many great blessings in being raised in a Christian home, one danger is that you begin to assimilate into the Christian way of doing things, going to church and even serving in the church in different ways, saying your prayers and having devotions. It's a family thing, or a cultural thing, and so you go along with the flow, but you never really count the cost and make a commitment to pick up a cross and die. That's the second thing to see in this text, after the cost of discipleship, we see the need to count the cost before committing to Him. Jesus illustrates the point with two images:

"²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹Or 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? ³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace."

Again, these images aren't difficult to understand. The point is, don't make a hasty decision to follow Jesus without carefully considering whether you're prepared to make the commitment and see it through to

the end. The illustrations underscore the fact that committing to follow Jesus is incredibly weighty, serious matter that should not be entered into flippantly, or casually. Jesus is saying everything He can to dissuade, shallow, superficial, half-hearted people from making an emotional decision in the heat of the moment that they don't intend to persevere in. This requires careful, deliberate, consideration. John Stott describes the tragic consequences of neglecting this:

"The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers, the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. This is the great scandal of Christendom, so-called nominal Christianity. In countries to which the Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin veneer of Christianity. They've allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism."

I count it as a great blessing in my life that I was pressed from the very beginning of my investigation of the Christian faith to consider the cost of following Jesus. I understood from the beginning that if Jesus was not going to rule and reign over everything for me, then it was worthless and foolish to try to maintain some thin veneer of Christian commitment. I knew that to come to Jesus was going to involve misunderstanding and hostility from my family, then it was going to require me to stop getting drunk on the weekends, and looking at pornography, and living life for me.

I don't assume all of you have had that same experience. Are you sure you've counted that cost, and reckoned yourself dead, or are you going through the motions of Christianity? Is it a family thing, a cultural thing, or maybe you made a good start ten years ago, but over time

you've grown lazy and distracted, and, like the man in this parable, you've stopped building. You're not seeing this commitment through to the end.

Beholding the Christ We Come After

Now how are we going to reckon with such a demanding cost, and weigh that carefully, and actually come out on the side of choosing Jesus? The only way you're going to make this kind of commitment to die to you and follow Jesus is if you read the fine print of this text, that is, you need to see something that is so subtle here that it's maybe not immediately visible on the surface.

I see it in these words: "²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross *and come after me* cannot be my disciple." If being a disciple is bearing a cross and coming after Jesus, then that implies that Jesus Himself is bearing a cross, doesn't it? If we've been following Luke throughout, we know Jesus has alluded to this already. As He says these words to the crowd, Luke has already told us that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem (9:51).

And Jesus has said very plainly what He expects to happen in Jerusalem: "²²The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." On the eve of His crucifixion, as Jesus shared His last meal with His disciples, He said that Isaiah 53:12 must be fulfilled in Him: "He was numbered with the transgressors". Jesus knew ahead of time that He was going to suffer on the cross, He had counted the cost, and knew that He would die a criminal's death, not for any crime He had committed, but for ours.

In bearing a cross and dying, we're not going anywhere where Jesus is not leading on ahead of us. Jesus, the Christ (9:20) who we are called here to come after, is the King of heaven, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who "renounced everything", who "hated His own life" and who

was willing to endure the hostility and wrath of His "family" in order to pay the penalty for our sin, cleanse us from the moral filth of our iniquity, clothe us with His very own righteousness, secure our adoption into God's family and our eternal citizenship in His glorious Kingdom. What glorious fine print this is!

In light of who it is we're to come after, and what He has done, could it really be a burden to pick up your own cross and come after Him? To see a King come and carry a cross for you, your cross, and take your place, who then summons you to follow Him, would it not be the height of folly for you to hold on to your life and agenda? After coming from heaven to earth to suffer and die for you, would His reign over you really be anything but the best possible life for you? Would you not be able to confidently say to Him, "Lord, whatever you command I will do, and whatever you send I will accept"? If He gave His life for you, would He fail to give you any good thing?

So in hearing this great challenge from Jesus to count the cost of what it means to truly follow Him, don't neglect to set your eyes on the One whom you are called to come after. Only when you see the beauty of this Man will you get to a place where you can say, "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee." You will surrender all only when you see Him surrendering all for you.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. God Almighty is speaking to you this morning, through His precious, perfect Word. The Son of God calls you to abandon everything in the pursuit of His glory and fame. This is His call to discipleship. Don't ignore Him!