

You Cannot Be My Disciple

Luke Series #38

Luke 14:25-35

David Sunday

October 13, 2013

Please open your Bibles to Luke 14. We will begin reading from Luke 14 at verse 25 thru the end of the chapter:

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. ³⁴ "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

This is the Word of God. We thank Him for it. Amen.

Verse 25 says great crowds accompanied Jesus but did they know where He was going? Did they know He had resolutely set His face toward Jerusalem where He would lay down His life on the cruel cross for the sins of His people? Were these crowds ready to follow Him all the way to the cross? What about us? Do we think about what we're saying when we call ourselves followers of Jesus? When we sing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus," are there any strings attached?

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?

(Am I a Soldier of the Cross by Isaac Watts, 1721)

When we come to the communion table, we do that in unity with brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, many of whom are paying a high cost to follow Jesus.

Two weeks ago, Ross Stern and Mike Jacoby and I had lunch in the home of Moroccan believers. There are very few believers in this city. With joy in their faces they told us how they had experienced great hardship in their families as a result of following Jesus. At one point, this man was facing persecution from the city government. The mayor had his shop locked and took away the keys so that for eight or nine months, he was unable to do business. No source of income. No bill of rights. No lawyer to defend his cause. That is the cost of discipleship and in a place like Morocco, it's very costly.

When we come to the communion table and eat this bread and drink this cup, Paul says we "*proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Jesus calls us to identify with Him in His death which is not only embracing His cross as the precious price that was paid for our forgiveness., it's also embracing His cross as the pattern for our daily existence. Jesus is calling us to live a cross-shaped life.

In the words of the German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "When Jesus calls a man, He bids him come and die." So as Jesus spreads a great banquet, the gospel invitation goes out over all the world. The gospel feast is portrayed for us at His communion table and He's saying to us, "Come and dine;" but He's also saying to us, "Come and die." There's no contradiction between these two.

1. Jesus Demands Nothing Less Than Everything

We must understand that salvation is free but following the Savior is very costly. We're going to unpack that statement with two implications. The first implication is that Jesus Christ demands nothing less than everything from us.

Three times in our passage, we hear Jesus repeat the same phrase:

- In verse 26, "*...he cannot be my disciple.*"
- Again in verse 27, "*...cannot be my disciple.*"
- Finally again in verse 33, you "*...cannot be my disciple.*"

Would Jesus ever say words like that to anyone today? I mean, isn't Jesus happy for us to come and give Him whatever we have to give Him even if it's only a little? Isn't Jesus glad that someone would want to volunteer their services to His Kingdom? Would Jesus ever look at a person today and say, "Sorry, you cannot be My disciple"? Not on those terms. Not under those conditions.

I think we like to imagine that Jesus is like a manager of a Goodwill store. He's happy to take whatever we're willing to give Him and He'll even issue a tax deductible receipt at the end to thank us for our donation. We tend to delude ourselves into thinking that we can come to Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and say, "Thank You," then go on our merry way. That's cheap grace. And to all who believe in cheap grace Jesus says, "You cannot be My disciple."

We flatter ourselves by thinking we're doing quite well if we just offer Jesus a little bigger slice of the pie of our lives, especially if it looks like I'm giving Jesus a bigger slice than the Christian next to me. We compartmentalize our lives and feel we're doing pretty well if one of the larger compartments of life is labeled "God" or "faith" or "church." But to every version of self-centered Christianity, Jesus says, "You cannot be My disciple. If you think that you can follow Me as a part-time job, if you're willing to give Me 10% or 50% or 80% of your life, You cannot be My disciple. Not if anything or anyone comes before Me or between Me and you. I must be first in your heart. I demand your whole-hearted allegiance or you cannot be My disciple."

Clearly Jesus is not interested in gaining a great crowd here. He actually seems concerned that many people are following Him and they don't have any idea why they're following Him. It's popular right now to be following Jesus but they don't know where He's leading and they're not ready to follow Him all the way to the end. Jesus is saying, "I'm not looking for part-time volunteers. I'm not seeking donations. I have great expectations for those who would come after Me. I demand everything. Nothing less than everything."

Imagine that if you were interested in becoming a member of New Covenant Bible Church and you set up a membership interview with me but after a few minutes of pleasant conversation, I looked you in the eye and said, "If you want to join New Covenant, you must be absolutely devoted to me. You must be more loyal to me than you are to your own parents or spouse or children. You must be ready to die for me. You must abandon your whole life to serve my cause. Your time, your talents, your money, your relationships—all must be surrendered to me. Then you can become a member." I hope you'd be looking for the nearest exit. I hope you would find your way out of here and never return because any mere mortal who looks at you and tells you that he must be dearer to you than your closest relatives—even your own wife—that man is either insane or he's evil.

But Jesus says it very clearly. There's nothing ambiguous or vague here. I look at a passage like this and I get what Mark Twain meant when he said, "It's not the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me. It's the parts that I do understand that bother me." We don't have trouble understanding what Jesus is saying here. It's not difficult. "Following Me will cost you everything," Jesus is saying. Applying it, believing it, living it is where we have trouble.

So Jesus specifies His demands as nothing less than everything in three arenas of our lives:

- He goes to our relationships in verse 26.
- He goes to our ambitions in verse 27.
- He goes to our possessions in verse 23.

In all three of these arenas: relationships, ambitions and possessions, Jesus says, "Are you ready to surrender all to Me?"

Our Relationships

In verse 26. Christ says, "I must be dearer to you than those who are dearest to you in this world. *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 is saying, "If you follow Me, it's going to automatically change every relationship in your life. When I am preeminent, other relationships need to get shifted around. The nearest people in your life may become alienated toward you. And other people that you used to think were abhorrent may become dear and intimate to you."

Jesus is shocking when He uses the word "hate" in verse 26 and I don't think that He wants us to mute it too quickly. I don't think Jesus is embarrassed by His words. I don't think Jesus apologizes, "Oh, I didn't really mean hate." No, He wants us to be jolted when we hear language like this. The hard edge of His saying is what helps drive it into our hearts. Now of course the Savior Who perfectly obeyed God's law, Who obeyed the fifth commandment—"honor your father and mother"—even when He was hanging on the cross, and Who taught His disciples that we are to love not only our friends and relatives but even our enemies, that Savior is never going to command us to cultivate an active hostility toward our loved ones. He's never going to tell us that we're absolved from the duty to show love to our relatives, to our neighbors. But He does insist that our love for Him must be so great that if necessary, other loves must look like hatred in comparison to our love for Jesus if they interfere with our love for Him. He must be dearer to us than our dearest relationships in this world. He must mean more to us than our own parents, our spouse, our children, even our own lives.

In the year 203, the Roman Emperor Eptimius Severus saw a growing Christian community in North Africa as a threat to patriotism so he arrested five new Christians who were taking classes to prepare for baptism. One of these was a North African noble-woman named Perpetua. They moved her to a part of the prison where she could feed her nursing child. While she was there, her father visited and pleaded with her: “Have pity on my gray head. Have pity on me, your father, if I deserve to be called your father, if I have favored you above all your brothers, if I have raised you to reach this prime of your life.” He threw himself down before her and kissed her hands. “Do not abandon me to the reproach of men. Think of your brothers. Think of your mother and your aunt. Think of your child who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride! Make the sacrifice to the Roman Emperor. Renounce Christ.”

She was moved by his plea but she was resolute. She answered, “Father, it will all happen in the prisoner’s dock as God wills, for you may be sure that we are not left to ourselves but are all in His power.” Later when she stood before the governor and the moment arrived for her hearing, her father burst into the room, this time carrying Perpetua’s son in his arms. He grabbed his daughter and pleaded with her again, “Perform the sacrifice. Have pity on your baby!”

The governor also pleaded with her, “Have pity on your father’s gray head. Have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperor.”

But Perpetua replied simply, “I will not.”

“Are you a Christian then?” asked the governor.

“Yes, I am,” Perpetua replied. She was then taken into the arena where she was ravaged by wild beasts and slain by the sword of the gladiators.

The cost of discipleship for us is no less than what Perpetua paid. Of course in our society where we have such freedom, it’s not likely that we’re going to be carried into an arena like that. We may but it’s not likely. When we look at the cost of discipleship that Jesus describes in verse 26, we have to look at our marriages and ask the question, “Have our marriages turned inward and become all about us and our comfort? Have we forgotten that God brought us together in this holy partnership so that together we can serve Christ and His Kingdom? Have we forgotten that our marriages are not ultimate—discipleship is?”

With my children, have we forgotten that following Jesus is the number one priority? That they’ve been entrusted to us so we can raise them to live for Him. They belong to God. So we must not get so wrapped up in our children and their activities that our lives start to become defined by them instead of our union with Jesus Christ by following after Him.

The cost of discipleship means that when our relatives put us in a position where in order to receive their warmth, affection, approval and support, we must mute or compromise our loyalty to Jesus. When that happens, Jesus says we must be willing and ready to relinquish their affection in order to maintain our allegiance to Him. Jesus never excuses us from the duties of love but He does require us not to depend on the delights and comforts of other people's love for us.

Augustine put it well, "We must love our families *in Christ*, not instead of Christ. We can be with our families *in Him*, but we cannot be with them without Him." Christ comes first.

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."

Whoever loves his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel will find it (Luke 9:24). A disciple is someone who says, "Lord, Your steadfast love is better to me than life itself."

A hundred years after Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, a man approached the great church father, Tertullian, with a problem. He said, "My business interests are colliding and conflicting with my Christianity. What can I do? I must live!"

Tertullian replied, "Must you?"

Jesus says, "You must love Me more than life itself. More than your relationships. Nothing less than everything."

Our Ambitions

Then in verse 27, He goes to our ambitions which can be godly or can often be self-centered. He says to us in verse 27 that we must be willing to bear whatever sacrifice, suffering and hardship following Him requires. Jesus says, "*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*" What does it mean to bear your own cross? It means you live your life daily, like one who is condemned to crucifixion, submitting to the sentence; expecting its execution by the Spirit. Dead to sin. Crucified to the world with its passions and desires. Dead to everything that would stand between you and complete obedience to the Savior. That's what bearing your cross is. And it's not just once. It's an on-going, daily reality.

Someone said, "It is one thing to die for Christ; it is quite another thing to live for Him daily because living for Him involves dying daily." This is an on-going reality for the Christian life. When Jesus talks about bearing our cross, He's talking about the kinds of hardships that

accompany our discipleship; the kinds of difficulties that come into our lives because we're following Jesus. We really should never use this terminology to refer to our common sufferings, our illnesses or our troubles that we share in common with all humanity. Rather, bearing your own cross has a very specific content. It's bearing the cross of Jesus. It's bearing the cost of discipleship.

What does that look like in life? Phil Ryken, President of Wheaton College, says, "Whenever we are disrespected at school, disadvantaged at work, despised by friends or disowned by our families because we take a strong stand for Christ, we are bearing His cross." Whenever we face spiritual hardships that come with the ministry we are doing in the name of Christ, we are bearing His cross. Whenever we share the sufferings of others because we love them for Jesus' sake, we are bearing His cross. When Jesus says we must bear our own cross, He means until we're willing to die for Him, we're not really ready to live for Him either. He demands nothing less than everything.

Our Possessions

Finally, he speaks to our possessions in verse 33. Notice He doesn't say you must be willing to renounce all that you have. We should be whole-heartedly willing to sing,

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold...

(Take My Life and Let It Be by Frances R. Havergal, 1874)

When you sing these words, are you actually thinking, "...but Lord, please don't ask me to do that. I hope You don't ask for my things." Rather Jesus says, "Anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple." That means you consciously, continually sing:

Take all I am, Lord, and all that I cling to
You are my Savior I owe everything to
Take all the treasures that lie in my storehouse
They cannot follow when I enter Your house

So I surrender all to You
I surrender all

(I Surrender All by Rich Dalmas)

"When I pull into the driveway and look at my house, it's Your house, Lord. When I think about my schedule and my time, it's Your time, Lord. When I look at my salary that gets deposited in my account this week, that's Your salary, Lord. When I look at my savings or my retirement account, it's Yours Lord. My job is Yours. My possessions are Yours. I am not my

own. I've been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20); I belong to You Who died and rose again for me. So all that I have is Yours—I renounce it. It belongs to You and whatever You entrust to me, I must use in a way that demonstrates You are everything to me. You're my treasure—not these things."

Following Jesus demands nothing less than everything. That's the first implication.

2. We Should Come to Christ at All Costs But We Must Count the Cost

Look at the Scriptures and the parables that Jesus tells in Luke 14:28-32. Jesus isn't trying to discourage us from coming to Him. He's not saying, "You know, I really don't want you people to come anyway." So He does all that He can to keep us from coming. Rather Jesus is showing us the honesty of grace. He's not doing a bait and switch. He doesn't want disciples who do not know what they are getting into. So He lays it all on the line and says, "Take some time to think this over carefully before you commit yourself to Me."

The first parable in verses 28-30 is saying, "Consider the cost of following Me." He talks about a person building a tower who needs to sit down and count the cost to make sure he has enough to finish it. The second parable is saying something different. "Consider the cost of not following Me." Yes, there's a cost to following but there's also a cost to not following.

Notice in both of these parables, the Word that is repeated twice is "first sit down."

- Verse 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?*"
- Verse 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 to him with twenty thousand?*"

Some people think Christians are just people who get swept up in emotions. Or they're people who just drift into discipleship. Jesus is saying, "No true follower of Mine just drifts in. No true follower of Mine is just born into this. I don't want people who are just swept up by their emotions. I'm not interested in whipping up a crowd. I want people who will sit down first and think."

Count the cost. He's not hiding it from us. He's being very clear. There's no fine print like in this carpet cleaning advertisement we received in the mail recently. I thought we could get our whole house cleaned for \$24.95 but the small print made it clear that if we actually want cleaning fluid on the carpet, it's going to cost so much extra per square foot. I couldn't even figure out how much it was going to cost to really get our carpets cleaned.

Jesus isn't like that. He shows us His very worst because He knows His best will far outweigh the worst. Matthew Henry, and English Bible commentator from the 15th century, says, "Satan shows the best but hides the worst because his best will not [counterbalance] his worst; but Christ's will abundantly." Jesus knows that the gift of the Kingdom—the riches of the Father that He's already mentioned in Luke 12:32—that it's His Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. Jesus knows that the Kingdom will far outweigh—infininitely outweigh—the cost of discipleship. So He's not embarrassed to say it's going to cost us something. The devil knows that all he can throw us is a few trinkets for a very short time, then there's an everlasting hell and misery and deprivation. So Satan shows us his best and hides the worst; Jesus says count the cost but also count the cost of not following Me.

I believe that's what He's getting at in verses 31-32:

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? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

He's talking about two kings going to war. One king has ten thousand; the other has twenty thousand. The king needs to decide, "Do I really want to do battle against a king who is much mightier and stronger than I am?" The question Jesus is putting to us is this: "When the King of Kings comes again in His glory, with all the angels of heaven with Him, will you be able to stand against Him then? Will you be able to stand against the King of Kings and Lord of Lords when He returns or will you be among the multitudes who will run to the mountains and cry for the rocks to fall of them to hide them from the face of the Lamb (Revelation 6:15-17)? Jesus is saying, "Count the cost of following Me but also consider the cost of not following Me because in the end, everyone will know that it's infinitely more costly not to follow Jesus than it is to follow Him.

Look at verse 32. There are terms of peace available. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is offering amnesty through the gospel. He is saying, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Turn from your own selfish existence and doing it your way. Put your trust in Jesus and He will save you."

Come to Christ at any cost but do count the cost. It would be far better not to come to Christ at all than to go to Him without counting the cost, going down the path a little and then turning back. People who do that are like salt that has lost its taste and cannot be restored and is only good to be thrown away on the manure pile. Jesus is saying, "If you have ears to hear, listen. Listen crowds. Listen half-hearted followers. This isn't a game. This is life or death. Heaven or hell. Everything hinges on your choice to follow Me or not."

Follow Jesus at any cost but do count the cost.

That brings me to a final question. We've said that salvation is free but following Christ is costly. I wonder if you're wrestling in your mind with how to fit those two things together. If salvation is free, how can it be that following the Savior is costly? I've been wrestling with that because I believe those who are unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship, those who won't follow Jesus, cannot experience His free and glorious salvation. I believe with all my heart that salvation is free—it's freely given to all who believe. There's nothing we can do to earn or deserve it. But at the same time I believe that following Jesus is costly and that He does not in any way water down the price. So how do you put these things together?

Here's how I would describe it: The cost of discipleship is not the price of admission into God's Kingdom. Praise God because we could never afford that. If my getting into the Kingdom of God depended on me paying the cost of discipleship, I would be forever uncertain and cut off from the Kingdom. I know that though I want to follow Christ fully, I have not fully paid the price of discipleship. The debt that I've accumulated in my warfare against God's Kingdom is too great and the price of admission is so high that if I am required to pay the cost, I would be forever forbidden entry into God's Kingdom.

Praise God that there is One Whose name is above every name, Who counted the cost and He had more than sufficient funds in His account to cover the price for us all. Jesus counted the cost.

He left his Father's throne above
So free, so infinite his grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.

(And Can it Be that I Should Gain by Charles Wesley,

He humbled Himself, poured out His own life in service to God and others. He bore the cross; He endured betrayal, suffering and death. He counted the cost and paid all the debts that we could never repay. All the charges we could never afford have been fully covered by our Savior so He can freely offer salvation to everyone who repents and believes in Him. That's good news!

So what then is the significance of the cost of discipleship? If it doesn't purchase citizenship in the Kingdom, what is the significance of it? Here's how I have been thinking through this and I want you to think with me and ponder this—not just now but throughout the week ahead. You paying the cost of discipleship confirms the value of your place in Christ and His Kingdom. It's you recognizing, "My life is of no value to myself." It's you agreeing with the Apostle Paul when he says, "*I do not count my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only*

I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

It’s you saying, “My life is nothing. Jesus, Your life is everything. The only life that really matters to me is Christ in me, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). So you paying the cost of discipleship is not you paying for your salvation, it’s you renouncing everything that diminishes your trusting and treasuring Christ as Savior. It’s not the price of admission into the Kingdom; it’s the proof of your loyalty to the King. It’s you transferring all your investments from the bankrupt, failed economy of this world and depositing them into the eternally secure and infinitely expanding treasury of Christ’s Kingdom. It’s your affirmation that you believe the cost of discipleship is nothing compared to the infinite worth of Christ’s Kingdom. Your willingness to embrace this costly path is you saying by faith, “I trust in and treasure Him Who paid it all so I could be welcomed into His Father’s Kingdom.”

Those who are not willing to pay the cost prove they don’t treasure the cross. Those who do not treasure Christ’s cross do not trust in Him as Savior. Those who don’t treasure His cross think that grace is cheap. No, grace is not cheap—it’s costly. It cost Jesus everything. When we treasure the cross and trust the Savior, we can honestly sing,

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

(When I Survey the Wondrous Cross by Isaac Watts, 1707)

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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