

The Cost of Discipleship: Commitment

Luke 14:25-26

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The Gospel of Luke, Chapter 14, starting at verse 25, reads as follows:

"Now great multitudes went with Him, and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.'"

Let us pray.

We pray, Heavenly Father, that You would make the Lord Jesus our vision this morning. That we would see Him as the One who is ruler of all, as the One who is exalted, lifted up on high, who has been given a name which is above every name, at which name every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. I pray, Lord God, that You would send Your Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our understanding, to bring to life those that are dead, to revive Your church, and to empower me as I preach Your word, and to give grace to Your people as they hear the word of God. May all that is done today praise the Lamb that was slain, that He may be glorified in our response to the word of God. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, we've been going through our studies through the doctrines of discipleship, and a few weeks ago, two weeks ago, we looked at Luke Chapter 9 and considered the challenge of discipleship. We looked at the three cases in Luke Chapter 9 of different people that either confronted Jesus or Jesus confronted them, and they heard and learned of the challenge of what it

meant to be a disciple of Jesus. And although we don't know the end of each one of those people, it is rightly to be assumed that they walked away without following Jesus. They were confronted with a challenge that they were unwilling to meet, and we learned that the challenge of following Jesus Christ is a costly challenge.

And what I mean by costly, I do not mean that by following Jesus Christ we earn for ourselves reward, as if we pay something to God and then God therefore accepts us. All that has been done for us in Christ is the ground of our acceptance before God. Nothing in our hands we bring, simply to the cross we cling. But when we say that it is costly, it is costly in the sense of what the hymn writer says, as Isaac Watts says, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

And this is the idea of the costliness of following Jesus, that the call of discipleship calls us to a Savior who demands our entire affections, who demands our lives, our soul, our all. And this is the essence of the Christian faith, that you cannot come to God halfheartedly for conversion. This is not how it works. There must be a conviction, there must be a conviction of sin, and a conviction of the righteousness that God has provided in Christ, and a conviction and understanding that being a believer in Jesus is more than just confessing that which Christ confesses, but walking after His footsteps.

And now we come to Luke Chapter 14, and in Luke Chapter 14, we probably have the most extensive portion on discipleship in the entire scripture, where there is a great length here of Jesus Himself elaborating, perhaps more than any other text in the scripture, on this issue and subject. And the theme of this entire passage that was read this morning is the cost of discipleship. So yes, we saw the challenge, and in the challenge, there was cost. We saw the practical way in which that played out in the lives of those three people. But now Jesus lays it down clear, unequivocally, openly, so that those that are hearing His voice will not misunderstand the conditions upon which discipleship is laid, the conditions that are laid for discipleship.

If anyone ever thought Jesus to be a charlatan, if anyone ever thought Jesus to be someone who was just in it for the following or in it for the money, if anyone ever thought Jesus to be one of those kind of prosperity preachers, I encourage them to read carefully the scriptures, again and again, the passage that we read this morning. If anyone thinks that Christianity is a religion of the soft, if I could say, those that are not—it's not a cross-bearing religion, but it's rather a comfortable religion whereby everything is a life of ease—I encourage them to read again and again this portion of scripture.

If anyone would think that Christianity is a religion of political correctness,

imagine Jesus being a politician and saying these words to the people that were under his authority. You would see very clearly; you'd probably never hear these words come out of the mouth of any politician. Not politically correct to demand the allegiance of a people, all of it. These words are not words that are to be minced. These are the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that speaks in such a way that He was not in it for the numbers, but that He might make manifest those who were true disciples of His and those who were just coming along for the ride.

This should speak to us volumes as to how the church of Jesus Christ should operate in their evangelistic efforts, that we are not after how many people were baptized last month or how many people made a profession of faith, but rather we should take heed to the words of Jesus, that those who come under the sound of the preaching of the gospel consider the cost of following Jesus Christ.

When Jesus uses an illustration in this passage, He doesn't use an illustration that indicates that following Jesus is a lighthearted matter or a matter like a game. You can go in and out, and you can just do whatever you want, and it would all be fine. The illustration that He uses in verses 28 to 32 speaks volumes. Look what it says in verses 28: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace."

Jesus doesn't use the example of kids playing games in their backyard as in regards to following Himself. He uses two examples that are of serious matters. He uses the example of a builder, and He uses the example of a king, and He uses the example of the builder and of a king to show that they are embarking on an enterprise. There is before them this project. There is before them this potential battle, and as they are to go about this costly enterprise, He says they must first sit down and count and calculate and think through the issues that are involved in their moving forward in this enterprise.

He uses an example of a builder to show that when the builder begins to build and he doesn't finish that which he has started, there is a lot of costly resources that have gone to waste. So He says, think about that. That's a great cost, so the builder first works out, do I have enough money to do it? Is everything set in order, and they proceed. And He uses the

example of a king going out to battle and says, you know what, the failure to go and count the cost of a battle will end in the loss of human lives.

So Jesus uses some two very serious things and shows in both cases that the failure to meet the conditions or the failure to be prepared to proceed forward in these things—building or warfare—will result in the humiliation of the person and also the mockery of that which they intended to do and failed to do it. The king that goes hastily into battle, not considering whether he, having enough soldiers, can conquer this other army with this many soldiers, will have to then humble himself and send out a delegation and surrender and say, "Oh, peace, peace, I made a big mistake here." Probably a lot of lives would have been lost even in that process.

And the builder himself, having, as it were—you've probably seen those building sites with scaffolding that have been hanging around for a very long time, and you think, "Oh, that guy probably went bankrupt, didn't he?" Well, that's what happens. And it speaks to the lack of commitment and readiness and understanding of what they were getting themselves into. And Jesus shows this, that the consequences of not counting the cost and sitting down are dire.

And what Jesus is simply saying is, it's not just a matter of being hasty in this, but thinking, sitting down, and counting the cost. Now, in this passage of scripture, and over the three weeks, we'll look at this scripture, there are three areas of cost that Jesus brings out in this passage. The first area is the cost of commitment, which we'll consider today. The next area is the cost of a cross. And the third area is the cost of forsaking all that we have and coming after Jesus. And we're going to consider this morning the cost of commitment.

Each of these costs placed in this text of scripture all are set down as a condition upon which Jesus says, "You cannot be My disciple unless there is a readiness and a willingness and a counting of those very things." And so it is true to us today, yet to profess the name of Jesus Christ and unwilling to meet the conditions that are laid down of discipleship, we are deceiving ourselves to think that we really belong to Him when it would only be made manifest that we are not.

Verse 25 paints a scene for us that is quite vivid, and as we look at this passage, I want us to think about it. "Now great multitudes went with Him, and He turned and said unto them." Jesus had a lot of people. Great multitude is a very great number of people. They went with Him. The word "went" is in the imperfect tense, meaning they continuously followed Him, or they were around Him. They were following Him. They were with Him. They went with Him. It wasn't just the first time they saw Him. They prob-

ably been listening to His teaching and following Him out through all the day, or probably even a few days, whatever it may be.

And you can just imagine this, this crowd, which would be hard to almost number, or of a great number, Jesus walking there, following Him, and you could think, "Wow, amazing, what an audience." And just imagine for a moment Jesus walking, and He stops, and He turns to them, and He says probably some of the most strongest words in all the scripture. As verse 26 says, "If anyone—that great multitude—anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

That's confronting, very confronting. Jesus is saying something that could quite easily be misunderstood, but He is saying it in the way that He is saying it because He's trying to get a point across. He uses the words "hate," "father," "mother," "brother," "sister," "his own wife," "own life also," and if you are unwilling and you do not hate, you cannot be My disciple. Straight away, immediately, we think to ourselves, "What on earth is He talking about?"

Now, care must be taken as we approach this. We don't want to fall into the trap of being overly literal, but we don't want to fall into the trap also of not giving to Jesus' words the force that they were intended to do. And there is danger on either side of this, where we can just be dismissive as to what Jesus is saying, or we can over-literalize it and misapply what Jesus is saying. So we walk a tightrope in this text of scripture, but something that we need to understand first and foremost concerning this confronting text is that we need to understand that there must be parameters that are set for our understanding of it. What are the parameters?

Well, we have to avoid literalism, understanding that in language there is something called hyperbole, which is a purposely and a purposeful exaggerated statement to make a point which may not be properly understood by the person if it was not set in such a forceful manner. This is what a hyperbole is referring to. You know the passage of scripture that says, "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you." Well, is Jesus teaching us self-flagellation here, or is He teaching us the idea of self-harm? We'd be foolish to think so. What is Jesus saying here? He's talking about the severity of cutting off with sin in your life, the radical amputation that needs to take place for the very things that keep you from obeying Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus is referring to there. Same thing here.

Here is our hyperbole, a deliberate exaggeration so as to make a point. So we want to be careful not as to be overly literal, whereby we would therefore

begin to have a justification to hate people, firstly. Secondly, we must avoid contradiction. As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the inerrant, inspired Word of God. And that simply means that the Bible is true in every part, and it is without error in every part. Which means in this application that no teaching of scripture is in error. And what happens to many people when they confront the scriptures is they straight away try to excuse God and say, "Well, God didn't really mean what He said. God doesn't really—you know, He's not really saying that," or whatever it may be, and they seek to diminish what the scripture is teaching, or they simply say, "You know, it should have been said this way," or "Jesus did it wrong," you know, basically, "God, you know, should have said it this way," or "Paul's writings, we need to, you know, iron them out a little bit and let our modern interpretation shape the way we think about Paul," or whatever it may be.

Well, the Bible teaches, and we believe in the Bible teaches, the inerrancy of scripture, which means that there are no contradictory commands in the scripture, and you can turn to any place in scripture, and they should all agree with the counsel and wisdom of God, that God is not a liar, that He cannot lie, and that everything He says, therefore, is true. And so when we have this high view of scripture, and we are aware of the literary types in scripture, we then can come to understand this text very clearly.

So, the same person that tells us to love our enemies and do good to those that despitefully use us, the same person that says to us, "If you hate your brother, you are a murderer," the same person that teaches us—it's God Himself—teaches us that we are husbands that love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, the same person that teaches us that we are to honor our father and mother, says in this text of scripture, "You are to hate father, mother, brother, sister, wife, and your own life also." And so we have to ask ourselves the question, "What is meant by this? What is meant by this?"

And this is the other point that helps us with the parameters of scripture to understand this text of scripture, and that is that other texts of scripture serve as an interpretive key to this text of scripture, in that we can understand what is meant by the whole counsel of God at this point. There are places in scripture where the term "hate" is used in such a way as to describe a loving less. Okay, let me put it this way: in the King James Version of the Bible, in Genesis Chapter 29, verses 30 to 31, the Bible says Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. He loved Rachel more than Leah, and the next verse says, "And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He blessed her." The Lord saw that Leah was hated, but that hatred was described previously as that he loved Rachel more than Leah. And so the word "hatred" could be used, and it was even used in the Hebrew context, as that which is loving less.

What about Matthew Chapter 10? This is probably the best interpretive key passage that we considered, we should consider when looking at this passage. Matthew Chapter 10, verse 37, Jesus says here, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." And so we come to this text of scripture, we must not diminish what it is saying, but neither should we take it in such a way and apply it so as to contradict that which the rest of scripture is saying.

The question that we have to ask ourselves is, "What is Jesus saying?" What Jesus is simply saying here to His disciples, or to the multitude that were there before Him, is that your love for Me must be supreme in its commitment to Me over all your relationships. Listen to the words that Jesus uses in this passage, two words, or two should I say categories of words, that help us understand what He is talking about. He uses words of relationship. He uses father, mother, wife, brother, sister, and your own life also, but He uses words of relationship, and He touches on the most dearest relationships that are known to man. He touches on the wife, husband and wife relationship, the marital relationship, but He goes even beyond that and touches on a father and a son, and a mother and a daughter, and a brother and a sister.

He touches on the most dearest, cherished relationships that are important to humankind, to man. The most dearest, yes, but also the most influential. He touches on the relationships that most influential in the lives of the multitudes. Here you have a father who tells his son something very influential, a mother and a daughter, a wife and a husband. What could be a more influential kind of relationship there, right? Where the wife and the husband, it's so dear, it's so important, and it's so influential, it's shaping, it's persuasive. Those relationships have persuasion in the lives of the multitudes.

He also touches on the most committed relationships, the relationships whereby we are most committed to. You've heard it being said, "Blood is thicker than water." You know, the husband-wife relationship, you know, this is a union relationship where there is high levels of commitment. There is also in the husband and wife, and the father and the daughter, and mother and all those relationships, high levels of commitment.

Jesus touches on the most dearest, most influential, and most important relationships that are known to the human race, whereby we are most committed to them, and He touches on them so—what is Jesus trying to say by the fact that He touches on these? He's trying to say that this is a matter of your relationships. This is a matter of your relationship to Me in com-

parison with your earthly relationships. But not only does He touch on relationships, He touches on affection. Why use the word "hate"? You only use the word "hate" in this context if you are trying to imply something about love and something about affection.

You understand what's happening here. Jesus is calling the multitudes to Himself, laying down a condition of their discipleship, and He is essentially saying to them, "When I say 'hate,' what I am referring to is that you must guard your affection so that you must love Me more." It could even be said so much more that those relationships, you could be accused of hatred in those very relationships when you choose Me over those that are most dearest to you.

He uses affectionate terms and terms of relationship, and so the challenge that Jesus is bringing out is this: Why the word "hate"? Well, affections first, love Him supremely, but the challenge is this—let me give it in way of illustration. You have a man or a woman grows up in a Muslim home, and they hear of the great gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they see Jesus to be more than a prophet, but He is Messiah, Lord, and King, God manifest in the flesh, who truly died for sinners. And this Muslim man or woman is confronted with the gospel, and they see the glory of Jesus Christ, and they want Him, and they want to know Him and believe on Him, and they sit down, and they speak to their father, or they speak to their mother, or they speak to their brother, and say, "If you follow Jesus and become a Christian, we will disown you from our family. You are not our children anymore. I will leave you," as a husband might leave his wife. "Your life will even be threatened. You are not welcome in this household anymore."

You get the illustration. Jesus is saying, in that context, "What will you do? You must hate father, mother, brother, sister, and your own life also if you are to be My disciple. You must love Me supremely over your most dearest, most influential, most committed relationships." The same could be said true even in Roman Catholic homes. "You follow this Jesus, you believe on Him, you get baptized—you have already been baptized—you get baptized, and get ready, cold shoulder, dismissal from family, lose an inheritance."

You name it, the cost is set before the sinner, and they must be willing, in coming to follow Jesus, to be hated of all men, and in their affections have Christ so supremely that their family might even say to them, "If you loved us, you would be doing this." But you must not love us. The reply should come from the true disciple, "I love Jesus more than you," for Jesus Himself says, "Whoever loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."

This is described in the passage we also read in John Chapter 10 that was read to us this morning, to help people understand that Jesus did not come to bring peace on earth but a sword, that the very gospel that Jesus preaches and the very demands that Christ makes are sharp. They are, in many ways, divisive to the hearts of those that do not want to submit to His rule. It shakes and stirs families, relationships. It challenges the most dearest things that we hold to, and Jesus says, "All right, King, all right, builder, are you ready to embark on this project? You say, 'I'm ready. My family now is happy for me.' What if, in six months' time, they are not happy? What if, in one year's time, or in two years' time, things change in their attitude, and they are no longer happy that you are a Christian, and they start to cut you off? Will you finish the building project, or will you walk away from it? Will you send four ambassadors to make peace, and in a sense in which you will then surrender, or will you hold fast to your commitment all the way to the end?"

You see, this is what Jesus is challenging the people with, the great multitudes with, so that they might understand the significance and the cost of commitments in following Jesus Christ. What is the key consideration? Or Jesus touches one thing and one thing alone in this text. He touches our love's allegiance and commitment. This is what it's all about. Jesus is asking this question to them: "You want to follow Me? Me first, full allegiance, full commitment. There is no half-heartedness. You must count the cost and decide on following Christ."

Consider what it may cost. Love's allegiance, not love's feeling, but love's commitment. How many people today say, "I love Jesus," and Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." But, Lord, those commandments that You ask me to keep will affect the very relationships in my life that are most dear to me. "Whoever hates not his father, mother, brother, sister, is not worthy of Me. If you don't love Me more than, then you're not worthy of Me. If you love Me, keep My commandments."

You see, it's easy to have love's feeling in that I feel like I love God, but what Jesus calls for is not love's feeling but love's commitment and obedience that shows that you really love Me, that shows that you're really committed to Me. It shows that if I ask you to do anything, you'll do it, no matter the cost. It's love's allegiance that is being touched here. It's not simply being the idea that it's a matter of feeling, but it's a matter of commitment. It's a matter of the reality. Does your affections for Jesus drive you to obedience, wholehearted obedience, whereby He takes the preeminence in your life?

Jesus is concerned with such allegiance. He is concerned with such things. It is a call to transfer our ultimate commitment from that which masters us,

from that which dominates us, from that which influences us, from that which informs our every decision, and to transfer the commitment of those things to Christ. Sit down, and you consider your life, and you consider a project, or you consider something moving forward, and the first things you give thought to show whether or not your allegiance is completely for Christ or not.

The Word of God comes to you, whether through the counsel of another, through the preaching of the scriptures, or even through reading the Word of God, and you see something in the scripture that touches an area in your life, a decision that needs to be made. Let me ask you this: How do you process that decision? If you can answer that question and examine how you process the decision, it will reveal your primary allegiance, your love's allegiance.

When you're confronted with a challenge from the Word of God that you know to be true—I'm not simply saying because a man says it or a preacher says it—I'm saying you are convinced by scripture, and your conscience is bound to the Word of God that this is true, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? "What will my boss think? What will my wife think? What will my parents think? I don't want to offend. I don't want to rock the boat. Things are running quite smoothly. How will my children react? What will it cost me?" And all these things start flooding our mind, consuming our minds. "How will this affect my reputation? If I do this, people might think I'm fanatic. How are they going to understand that I actually go and tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ? How are they going to get that, that I read my Bible, that I pray, that I seek God, that I love others that are unlovable? When there's bitterness in a relationship, and I go to love that person, when everyone around me says, 'You're crazy for doing so. You should hate that person,' and I say, 'No, but I love Jesus more,' and Jesus tells me I must do this, they're going to think I'm crazy. My reputation will be ruined. I'll look like a weakling, a softy, a sissy. How will people in the workplace going to think of me because I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes? What will happen? What will my children say of me, those dear children that I love best, that I've raised with all my energy? What will they say of me? How will they feel of me if I take my stand on the authority of the Word of God?" And we calculate, and we think, and we sit down, and what we think about shows where our love's allegiance lies.

We can't sleep at night, not because we fear what God thinks about us, but we are concerned about what man thinks of us and how we're going to face men tomorrow, and women tomorrow, and our friends tomorrow, and our family tomorrow because of our stand for Jesus Christ. And Jesus says, "If that's your attitude, forget it. You can't be My disciple. You can't

live your life hearing My voice, following My commandments, putting Me first, and at the same time let these relationships be most influential in your life. You have more commitment to them than to Me. It won't work. It won't work. You'll be tugged in every which way. You'll go out one day strong, 'We're going to fight the battle,' and the next day, you're going to retreat. You're going to have cold feet. You're not going to stand your ground and hold the fort."

Jesus just told His disciples, "I'm sending you out as sheep among wolves, and they're going to persecute you. Father's going to even betray brother, and you're going to go from city to city, and he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." Jesus tells His disciples, as He's saying to them, "Listen, this is not the path of ease. This is not about taking the path of least resistance. This is about the honor of My name because I have died to purchase your salvation. Therefore, follow Me. Follow Me. Do not I deserve the rewards of My sufferings?"

"Do not I deserve the rewards of My sufferings?" That's what happened when the Moravians, they went out to—they wanted to reach a group of people that were on an enslaved group of people on an island in Africa. There was no way for them to go but to sell themselves into slavery to the slave owners so that they might preach Christ to those poor African slaves there on the island. And the man who was the slave owner said, "There will be no preacher there. There will be no missionary coming on this island." He enslaved the people on that island, and they were to go. How would they go carry the gospel there? They decided to sell themselves into slavery as slaves so that they might reach those people.

Think about it. Do you really believe their friends and families were all for them? "Nah, you're crazy. Surely there's another way." Or they might have told him, like William Carey, "God doesn't need you to reach the elect. He'll do it Himself without you." And they could have made all kinds of excuses for not taking up their cross and counting the cost. They would have been rejected by their friends, family, and all for doing this. But you know what? They believed that the Lamb that was slain was worthy, and because He had called them to this task, they loved Him more than father, mother, brother, sister, and their own life also.

Hey, you might say, "Well, I'm not in that situation." But yes, you are. Maybe not to go out there as a missionary to a slave trading place in some part of Africa, but you, right here, right now, in your marriage, in your family, with your workplace, are challenged day by day with where your love allegiance lies. And Jesus says, "If you're not willing to hate everything that is dear to you, relationship-wise, that governs you and is influential in you and you're committed to, and put Me first, forget it. You cannot be My disciple.

Christianity is not for you."

Can't just say this: Christianity has become so politicized and just so—I could say, yeah, comfortable—that the call to the great multitudes needs to be made afresh in the church because for many people, we have not sat down, and we have not counted the cost of following Jesus Christ. We ask, "How will it best benefit me?" But Jesus says, "You cannot serve two masters. You cannot seek the glory of God and the praise of men. You cannot have Christianity without a cost."

I don't know where it is in your life, but I just want you to think about this: Christ is worth it, more than enough. I know that the dearest relationships—husband's wives, even—but what about God? Is He the most dearest, precious, and best? If so, you can be His disciple. If not, keep counting, keep considering, and realize that these are the demands that our Lord and Savior makes.

Let us pray.