

## Luke 14:25-35

<sup>25</sup>Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup>Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup>For which of you, if he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup>Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, everyone who sees it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘This fellow began to build, but was not able to finish.’ <sup>31</sup>Or what king, as he goes out to confront another king in war, will not first sit down and consider if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>And if he is not able, he sends out a delegation and asks for terms of peace while his opponent is still far away. <sup>33</sup>So then, any one of you who does not say farewell to all his own possessions cannot be my disciple. <sup>34</sup>Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its flavor, how will it become salty again? <sup>35</sup>It is not fit for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

## Priorities

### I.

It wouldn't be long now. We have been talking about the fact that in the Gospel readings from the past number of weeks Jesus has been on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. All along the way, people followed; people listened to him teach; people watched to see if he would do or say anything they might consider incredibly significant.

Of all those who walked along that road, only one knew the future. Only Jesus knew what was awaiting him at the end of the road.

One person, in the whole history of the world—past, present, and future—was ever totally innocent. Only one. That One was Jesus. He never committed any crime. He never said the wrong thing, accidentally hurting someone he was trying to help. He never did the wrong thing—nothing or no one was ever able to influence him to do something that was outside the boundary of God's will.

That One innocent individual knew what was waiting at the end of the road, in Jerusalem: the cross. He knew that at the end of his trial he would walk from the courtroom to the hill of execution, dragging the cross he would be executed on behind him.

It was high time some people thought about their priorities.

### II.

To the large crowd that was following along with him on his way to Jerusalem Jesus said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26, EHV).

Sometimes people get the mistaken impression that Jesus is all gospel. He never says a harsh word, he never uses God's Law in all its severity, he is always gentle and nice and loving. Well...he always is loving, but love doesn't always mean what some might *think* it means. Sometimes love sounds rather harsh.

Jesus uses the word “hate.” He says that to be a follower of Jesus a person must “hate” all kinds of close family members and friends, and even his own life. Does he mean it?

Yes. But how, exactly, does he mean it?

To explain, let's think about the close group of Jesus' disciples called the Twelve. Within the Twelve there was an even closer group of Jesus' friends—Peter, James, and John. Perhaps you could call them his three best friends. That didn't stop Jesus from telling them things that sound rather harsh. Jesus once said to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23, EHV). Jesus called one of his best friends “Satan.” And why? Because Peter was acting as a snare to Jesus. Peter was

threatening the mission Jesus was here to complete. Peter was trying to dissuade Jesus from carrying out the will of his Heavenly Father. Peter, in other words, in that moment was working for Satan, not for God.

Back to what Jesus says here: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26, EHV). It is a shocking statement. It brings us up short. We cannot help but sit up and take notice when Jesus tells us it is necessary to *hate*, after all the times he has told us to love. After all, Jesus told us to love even our *enemies*. If we are to love *enemies*, how is it possible that he would also want us to hate family and close friends?

The question is one of priorities. Where is your priority? Is it father and mother? Is it wife and children? Is it brothers and sisters? Is it your own life?

There is a saying that has been used. Books have been written with this saying in mind. Songs have been recorded. Politicians and other public figures sometimes use the phrase, too. It’s: God, family, country.

Notice which one is first: God.

But when people put their words into practice, that’s often not the order they use. When the order is flipped around, most often it is family that comes first. Sometimes one not even on the list is first: “self.”

That’s what Jesus was getting at. When family and friends come before God, your priorities are misplaced. If family and friends are above your loyalty to God, you might make certain choices about your relationship with the Lord Jesus that damage—and eventually destroy—your faith.

More shocking to those listening to Jesus that day was his next statement: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27, EHV). A cross was one of the most popular means of execution back then. It was chosen because of its exquisite torture on the one hanging from it, as well as the shame the executed and his or her family would endure by being put to death in this way.

Jesus knew this was to be his own fate. Before he would be hung on the cross, he would drag it to the site of his execution. So excruciating was the pain from dragging it that he didn’t even make it all the way; a citizen was grabbed from the crowd following along to take it the final distance.

Following Jesus can be very difficult. Discipleship is not a spectator sport. It demands participation. It is both costly and active. Following Jesus doesn’t mean just sitting in a pew and listening to a sermon prepared by the pastor; it means living your faith. Speaking up for your faith. Putting yourself out there. It might not happen much in our culture or our country, but it could mean giving up your life.

Are you ready?

Jesus continued with some military examples.

“Which of you, if he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup>Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, everyone who sees it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup>saying, ‘This fellow began to build, but was not able to finish’” (Luke 14:28-30, EHV). The structure Jesus indicated is an observation tower, usually intended to watch for enemies. If the intention is to be able to detect and meet military threats, you had better be prepared to complete your fortifications. Half-finished forts or towers or any kind of military structure isn’t going to do you any good.

“Or what king, as he goes out to confront another king in war, will not first sit down and consider if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup>And if he is not able, he sends out a delegation and asks for terms of peace while his opponent is still far away” (Luke 14:31-32, EHV). It is essential to be honest in the assessment

of military might. If there is no hope for victory, it is better to never start a military campaign rather than to end up in inglorious defeat.

Military preparedness is important to this very day. As I did, and several of our members did, all those going into military service in the US go through some basic training. The training is very physical. Many came in thinking they were in great shape and were going to breeze through training, but found that it wasn't quite that easy. The drill instructors wanted to get the most out of you they could.

Well beyond basic training are the Special Forces. The Army Rangers, Green Berets, Navy Seals, and other special forces undergo much more difficult training. Those who apply are told up front about the intensity of the training. They are told how many applicants can't make it through; some even die in this specialized training. They know the costs. They go anyway.

Count the costs before you train.

Have you counted the cost? Have you examined your priorities? Are you the strong Christian soldier? Are you prepared to follow Jesus, even to the point of death? Let me remind you that in your confirmation vows you promised just that—you promised to remain faithful to Jesus, even to the point of death. I have had many confirmation classes through my years in the ministry. I have watched many confirmands leave Jesus to go the way of the world. I have had a few tell me later that they finally got it and were now back to living their lives for Jesus.

### III.

Jesus counted the cost. Jesus set his priorities. He *knew* that no human being could do this perfectly. Remember Peter who had to be called Satan for interfering in Jesus mission? Jesus still loved him. Jesus forgave him. Jesus restored Peter to his position of disciple, even after Peter denied him at Jesus' trial.

*Jesus* paid the cost that not even his most ardent and faithful follower is able to pay. We cannot pay for the sins and misdeeds we have committed against a righteous God. Jesus can. Jesus did. That cross he was about to drag he dragged for you. He *knew*. *You* were his priority. *Your* eternal future was the cost he counted. He considered *you* worthy of such intense suffering it is beyond imagination.

You were Jesus' priority.

### IV.

“So then, any one of you who does not say farewell to all his own possessions cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33, EHV).

Do you really have any possessions? The Bible teaches us that we do not really own anything. *God* owns it all. When we gather the offering in a few minutes, we are not gathering what you are giving to God; you are returning a portion of what God has entrusted to you as a steward. Saying farewell to your own possessions means recognizing who it all belongs to.

“Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its flavor, how will it become salty again? <sup>35</sup>It is not fit for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away” (Luke 14:34-35, EHV).

You know just by tasting if something is salty. Back in Jesus' time, salt was seldom very pure. Other elements would sap the taste and leave it flat. There was no remedy. The only thing to do was to throw it away.

“The one who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:35, EHV). Many would desert Jesus. Once he was put on trial, all these crowds would disperse. Many of them would turn on him and chant “crucify,” right along with the religious leaders who hated Jesus. Some would understand.

You understand. You know that you cannot count the cost on your own; Jesus had to pay the cost for you. You know that sometimes your priorities aren't placed in the order God wants them to be. But you have ears to hear. You listen to the Lord Jesus. You count the cost he paid and thank him. Reset your priorities on a regular basis to put him first. Amen.