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The Cost of Being His Disciple

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TEXT: Luke 14:25-33 (ESV)

Now great crowds accompanied 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 bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a 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 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. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

We've been hearing a lot lately on the news about the cost of living compared to a year ago. Cost matters greatly to us. When we're going to purchase something, the first thing we tend to look at is the cost. And as we consider becoming maybe a part of a team or organization, we want to know what participation in this is going to cost me time-wise before we make a decision, right? Well, here's a question for you. What would you say is the cost of following Jesus? What's the cost of discipleship? How would you answer that question? We might get a variety of answers, such as: well, be a regular church worship attender and believe in and adhere to the creeds of the faith. Give and be a participant in church work and be kind and loving to others and tell other people about Jesus. And all of these statements are good things to do.

Well, in today's passage from Luke, Jesus answers that question in a most challenging way for us. He's talking to a large crowd of people who are so taken with him that they

were now accompanying him on his way to Jerusalem. Perhaps many of them were saying that they were his disciples already, or they wanted to be as disciples. Judging from what Jesus said to them, though, they must have appeared to Him to be more like fans than real followers. They were attracted to him, to his compassionate ways as powerful miracles tickled with the way he challenged the religious authorities and hopeful that he was the Messiah king who could overpower Roman oppressors and establish Israel as a power once again. I mean, they're impressed with this Jesus who shows such power and promise of a better life for them.

Well, in response to all that, Jesus spoke three hard statements to them in order to get them to stop and assess what discipleship to him is going to require. First, he pointed out, "If anyone comes to me and doesn't hate his or her own family and even his or her own life, they cannot be my disciple." Wow. Hate family and one's own life? That's pretty strong stuff, isn't it? This statement seems to fly in the face of the emphasis on family ministries that we encourage in our churches. And hearing, a person might think, "Is Jesus telling me that I'm supposed to start hating my family and disown them if I'm going to be his disciple? And hate my life? I thought I was supposed to love myself after all. Didn't Jesus say love neighbor as yourself?" It's important to understand that this word "hate" that is being used by Jesus is an ancient word which means to love less. It has a comparative sense to it. It means that this relationship with Jesus is to be treated as more important than any other relationship you have, even your family. He requires total allegiance to him. If forced to choose between your family and him or your very life in him, a true disciple will choose Jesus first.

Well, then he goes on to say that being his disciple involves bearing a cross. Hear His words: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." We need to remind ourselves that Jesus is a cross-bearer himself. That's who we follow. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and the cross. The crowds knew what the cross was about, that it was a cruel instrument used for torturous executions. While Jesus entered this world to hang on one of those crosses, to die on one of those crosses. His dying on a cross was our holy God's way to rescue people like you and me separated from him by our sinfulness. God's son, be nailed to a cross and die in would be the necessary atoning sacrifice to save us from sin and its consequences: death. Jesus would bear our sins at the cross and suffer the wrath of God's judgment for sin there, as he hung, separated from his father, crying out, "My God, my God, why have you

forsaken me?" This was his mission. The cross. He bore our sins upon the cross as a sacrificial atonement for sinners like you and me. So, the cross is about sacrifice.

Of course, the cross-bearing Jesus is calling us to is not about some physical affliction that we sometimes would call a call as our "cross to bear." And it's not about atoning for the sins of other people, but it is about sacrifice and serving his purposes. It's about sacrificing to bring the good news of Jesus to other sinners who need rescuing. So that they might have eternal life with God, and it might bring suffering and pain as we do that. Cross-bearing is my grateful response to what he first did for me. It's yielding every area of my life: my possessions, my family, my status, even my own life to him; placing everything at his disposal to be used for the cause of the gospel. It's standing up for him no matter what. And that can lead to some challenging, costly, and sometimes painful consequences for us can lead to adversity in our lives as we stand up for him. It could lead to the loss of things we hold near and dear, like reputation, relationships, comfort and even one's very life, in some cases, in order to be faithful to Jesus. For instance, it may lead to an uncomfortable circumstance like refusing to offer support to a family member or a friend for a decision that may be immoral in God's eyes, and they're looking for your approval anyway. It may mean discussing destructive behavior at the risk of never speaking to that person again. You may be viewed as a religious fanatic. It may mean rejection in a sense of relational distance from a loved one after telling them about Jesus and appealing to him or her to place their trust in him. And this can be painful and costly.

The story that comes to mind is that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who courageously stood up for Christ against Adolf Hitler, who was committing atrocities all around Europe and insidiously working at taking control of the German church in order to spread his Nazi propaganda, and silence the gospel. Bonhoeffer, he wound up imprisoned and later hanged for his efforts against Hitler. But here's the thing that's so remarkable: he could have safely stayed in New York City, teaching at a prestigious seminary as he was doing when all this began. But he sensed a call in from God to go back to Germany to stand up in Christ's name against this evil that had taken over. And it cost him his life. Before his imprisonment, he wrote a great book that's a classic that I recommend. It's entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer didn't just write about it. He lived it.

Finally, Jesus talks about possessions and our attitude towards them: "Any of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple," he says. Everything we possess is to be renounced for him, or you can't be as disciple. He's to be number one. Possessions, popularity, power, which can become like idols to us, are to be taken off the list and no longer in charge of our lives. Only Jesus is. In fact, all of this stuff is offered to Him for his purposes and use. So, it's a big decision, total commitment of self to be a disciple of Christ. It's costly.

And that's why Jesus uses those two analogies to encourage his listeners to stop and assess the cost. "Which of you desire to build a tower," he says, "doesn't first sit down and count the costs whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, you could end up being a laughingstock in front of those who are watching you when you can't get it done." "Or what king will go into war will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able to win with 10,000 men against another king with 20,000?" Jesus is basically saying, "I want you to think hard about the cost of being my disciple and making the decision like this. Are you willing to give everything up for me in the Gospel?"

Now you might be wondering, why is Jesus talking like this? Is He trying to discourage us? No, of course not. His purpose is to open our eyes and prepare us for what can be challenging and rough days ahead, which will come our way as we faithfully and obediently serve him and do what he says in this world. Situations are bound to arise, which will be hard, and they will tempt us to abandon him or compromise the Gospel and cause us to lose our impact for him and the Gospel. These conditions must be committed to and kept if one is to persevere in effectively serving Christ in the world. That's the whole point is making in his talk about salt. "Salt's good," he said. "But if it loses its potency," – as it could in those days with the low-grade salt – "it can't be restored. And then it's no longer useful for anything." Remember, Jesus has said that His disciples are the salt of the earth. If you're going to retain your salt, you're committing to these things to be my disciple, Jesus is saying. His vision for his disciples is that they might be able to join the Apostle Paul in saying at the end of their lives, "I fought the good fight. I finished the race. I've kept the faith."

And then Jesus closes by saying "He who has ears to hear, let them hear." That was his way of saying, "Pay attention. Listen hard to these truths I've given you and think about them." Well, this talk from Jesus must have been too intimidating for his hearers that day because he left that place with the same 12 disciples he started with. Not one more

person was added to his group, according to our report. The commitment he was calling for must have been too great for them to make. And I kind of understand that – I find his instruction on being his disciple quite sobering. This is no soft-sell job that Jesus is giving us. This is no easy believe-ism, cheap grace being pushed here. You don't get the idea from him that if you follow him as disciple, all will go well the rest of your life. In fact, what he's saying, it appears things might get more complicated and filled with inconvenient and uncomfortable situations. And that there really are great expectations for those who follow. Jesus isn't coming to make fans. He's calling us to be followers committed to him totally, and the cost of the Gospel.

A.W. Tozer, in a Christianity Today article entitled *The World Playground or Battlefield?* wrote this: “We can prove our faith by our commitment to it and in no other way.” And he believed that it does not command the one who holds. It is not a real belief. It's only a pseudo belief. It might shock some of us profoundly if we were suddenly brought face to face with our beliefs and forced to test them in the fires of practical living. Following Jesus, according to our passage, requires a total commitment on our part, a willingness to suffer losses and be uncomfortable and isolated and inconvenienced and ridiculed and ostracized by others, for his sake. And the sake of the good news.

And that's why, as one who has decided to follow Jesus, I thank God He's promised us, “Lo, I'm with you always to the end of the age,” as I attempt to serve him in this world. And I am so grateful that he's given us a helper, the Holy Spirit, who is there to lead and empower us to trust and obey. And I'm so glad I can call upon my Heavenly Father in prayer when I lack faith and strength and direction. And He will help me. You see, a disciple of Jesus is never alone or on his or her own when trusting and serving Christ in this world as his disciple. I'm so glad also for the testimonies and scripture that encourage me, like the Apostle Paul, who suffered such losses in his own life, said, “But I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, Jesus, my Lord,” and I'm so glad Jesus gave this reassuring promise. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account, rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in Heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

This text does cause me to pause and do a personal inventory of my own life as to what kind of a disciple I'm becoming. What shortcomings do I need to repent of and commit myself to overcoming? What idols have gotten in the way and distracted me from being

all in for my “All in all.” I invite you to ask that same question and to ask the question, “Do I see myself, as always, on call for him, always available? Does he have my total allegiance or have I set limits as to how far I’ll go for him?” Pastor Colin Smith once used this illustration in talking about the cost of discipleship. He writes,

I have vivid memories as a kid of my father taking me to an auction sale, telling me, “Don’t scratch your nose at the wrong time, son.” He also said to me, “Always remember this. Whenever you go to an auction sale, make sure you know your upper limit price.” And that’s ingrained in me. The great danger for us is that we walk into the Christian life knowing clearly our upper limit price. But Jesus does not allow us to set that. Our calling is to a life of unconditional obedience, where the price is unknown. You never know what’s going to come up.

I want to close with a story that Christian author R.S. Guinness wrote in his book *Impossible People*.

One of the greatest Christian leaders of the last century was John Stott, rector of All Souls, Langham Place in London, and a peerless preacher, Bible teacher, evangelist, author, global leader, and friend to many. I knew him over many decades, but I will never forget my last visit to his bedside three weeks before he died. After an unforgettable hour and more of sharing many memories over many years, I asked him how he would like me to pray for him. Lying weakly on his back and barely able to speak, he answered in a hoarse, whisper, “Pray that I will be faithful to Jesus until my last breath.” Would that such a prayer be the passion of our generation to get us right!

So I encourage you to make that prayer your daily prayer the rest of your days as a disciple of Jesus. If you’ve decided to follow him, in fact, let’s pray it together right now. You can just repeat the phrases after me. Lord, help me to be faithful to Jesus until my last breath. Amen.