

Text: Luke 14:25-33

Title: “Passionately Following Christ”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Luke 14:25. As you’re turning I want to remind you of our new Wednesday night prayer and Bible study time called Midweek Connection. Read text.

There’s one overriding truth running right through Jesus’ teaching here: Following Christ is serious business.

I want you to notice the two groups that Jesus has in His focus.

Luke 14:25-26 - Large crowds ... my disciple.

There is the “large crowd,” and there are those who would come out of the crowd to be a “disciple.” There were large crowds because Jesus was at the zenith of His popularity in the eyes of the Jews. They had seen Jesus heal the sick, raise the dead, feed the hungry and deliver the oppressed. But it’s clear that there’s a difference between the “crowds travelling with Jesus,” and those who have a relationship with Jesus as His “disciple.”

What is a disciple? A disciple is a learner, an apprentice, and a follower committed to be like his or her teacher. And Jesus is calling people out of the “crowds travelling with Jesus,” and into a relationship with Himself where we are committed to follow Jesus wherever that leads us. He’s calling us out of the crowds of people who are amused with Christ (for what He can do for them), and into that group of dedicated and devoted followers, who are completely sold out to Jesus.

Don’t misunderstand Jesus. He was not and is not desperate to have a large crowd following Him no matter the depth of their commitment. Rather than compromise the truth, he was willing to see the crowd thin out. And Jesus never recruits followers under false pretenses.

ILLUSTRATION - The Lord is not like a recruiting officer who says to a young man, "If you will join the Air Force, the Army, the Navy or the Marines, you'll get to wear a cool uniform and you'll get to line up and march in all of those glorious parades." But the officer doesn't go on to tell him that he might have to be away from his family for periods of time, and he will have to live in less than comfortable surroundings, and he may even be dangerous situations. The Lord Jesus never recruits followers under false pretenses.

So what is this disciple’s life that Jesus calls us to?

1. CHRIST IS THE SUPREME AFFECTION OF MY LIFE

Luke 14:26 - “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.

Now I don't know about you, but for the longest time I struggled with this. Is Jesus actually telling us that to be passionate followers of His that we have to hate our family? Well, to sort this out we need to know what Jesus said in other parts of the Gospels. For instance in Matthew 15 Jesus asserted that the 5th Commandment was still to be obeyed.

Matthew 15:4 - For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'

So when Jesus said in Luke 14:26 that if one doesn't hate his own family he cannot be a disciple, He must have something else in mind. Jesus is actually using a rhetorical device of comparison. In ancient times teachers would use a strong statement like this to show a comparison between two extremes. Jesus made this shocking statement to cause people to compare their devotion to him and their love for their own family because he wants the most important place in our lives even before our own family.

The point is that we are to love Jesus more than anyone else. Our commitment and love for Jesus is to be so great in comparison that it makes our love for everyone else, even our family, look like hate.

But the comparison doesn't stop there:

Luke 14:26 - "If anyone comes to me and does not hate ... even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.

I cannot love my own life more than I love Jesus, and be His true disciple. I have to lay it all down ... my family and my very life ... for Him.

And by the way, when Jesus is the supreme affection in my life, I will love my family in a way that I couldn't without following Christ. The selflessness that I learn in following Christ will make me a better mate, a better parent, a better son or daughter.

Following Christ is serious business. It means that Christ is the supreme affection of my life. But also,

2. CHRIST IS THE SUPREME AMBITION OF MY LIFE

Luke 14:27 - And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

What image do you have in your mind when you think of a cross? Is it a necklace around your neck? Is it a steeple on top of a church building? Well in the days of Jesus when you talked about a cross you were not talking about an ornament for adornment. Rather you were talking about an instrument of punishment and death.

If you were in a city like Jerusalem, controlled by the Romans, and you saw someone carrying a cross through the streets of the city, you immediately knew where it was going. This person was on a one-way trip to someplace from which they would never return. When the Romans crucified a criminal or captive, the victim was often forced to carry his cross part of the way to

the crucifixion site. And it was always done in clear sight of everyone. The Romans wanted everyone to know what happened to people who broke the laws.

And, of course, this would be how Jesus died ... by crucifixion. Isn't it interesting that in calling people to be His disciples He would use this image? I'm sure a marketing expert would pull their hair out at the thought of trying to get customers with this kind of image.

And that's the point. Jesus was not after religious customers. He was after passionate followers.

In taking up your cross you are saying, "I am willing to die to self. Christ is the supreme ambition in my life. I'm dying to all other ambitions, but the one of following Christ. Whatever else comes my way, Christ will always be the highest ambition in my life."

11:00 ILLUSTRATION - Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the theologian and seminary leader in Germany during the Nazi regime. His opposition to Hitler led to his imprisonment and ultimately his death. Six years before he wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Now I don't want you to misunderstand here. We're not talking about sacrificing our way into eternal life. That's just another form of works salvation. So don't make the mistake of thinking that you can't be saved until you make this sacrifice or that sacrifice.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

But it goes on...

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So when we come to Christ for eternal life, we come completely by faith. We can't do anything to save ourselves. Jesus made the complete sacrifice for our sins when He died on the Cross. But when we put our faith in Christ we must recognize that He didn't just die to get us out of hell and into heaven. He died and rose again to make us new people who no longer live for their own ambitions and agendas, but for the will of God.

8:30 ILLUSTRATION – Many of you know the name of George Beverly Shea, the great singer with Billy Graham. As a young man, was offered the opportunity to be an opera singer. He was offered wealth and fame. But he had already felt the call of God on his life to the gospel ministry. Bev Shea weighed his options. He prayed about it. And he sat down at the piano and he wrote those words that are so familiar to many: "I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today."

Following Christ is serious business. Now there are two parables here that Jesus uses to drive home this point. The first parable is about a builder getting ready to build a tower.

Luke 14:28 - “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?”

PARABLE #1 – THERE ARE COSTS TO OUR CHOICE TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

A wise person would never start a project without proper planning. Vineyards often had towers where watchmen would guard against thieves who might try to steal the harvest. An unfinished building standing in your vineyard would be humiliating. There is a price to pay if we want to be a disciple of Christ because we will have to do what he wants, not what we want with our life. The desire to build the tower is not enough. You must count the cost. So Jesus says the builder will “first sit down and estimate the cost.”

Luke 14:29-30 - For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

Notice the point here is not just starting something but finishing it. Following Christ is not a hobby we pick up and later put down. There are costs involved if we are to finish strong.

Following Christ is serious business. Then there’s another parable about a king getting ready to go to battle.

Luke 14:31 - “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?”

PARABLE #2 – THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO OUR CHOICE TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

Luke 14:32 - If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

Following Christ is serious business. There will be consequences to our decision. It changes the way we live our lives. It changes the way we do business. It changes the way we handle our money. It changes everything!

And to sum it all here’s what Jesus says...

Luke 14:33 - In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

This means we release control of all that we are and all we have. It is all placed in His hands. He determines how we spend our lives, our money and our time.

These two little parables have a single message ... a warning against thoughtless discipleship. Following Christ is serious business, and we need to be as deliberate about it as anything else important in our lives.

Now let me give you some homework. Our church has something called ...

THE BLUEPRINT FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

We are joining God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ. We envision a vibrant church composed of passionate followers of Jesus Christ who, having received the gift of eternal life and being transformed by the love of God, are empowered to live out the following: (LOOK AT YOUR NOTE SHEET)

1. LEARN AND APPLY THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD

- Increase their knowledge of God and His truth by hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on the Bible
- Seek to apply Scriptural truth in behavior and decision-making, resulting in a Christ-like lifestyle

John 8:31-32 - To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

2. OBEY GOD AND DENY SELF

- Strive to follow consistently the teachings of God's Word and the leading of His Holy Spirit
- Practice the spiritual disciplines by which one is trained in righteousness and strengthened to resist temptation

Luke 9:23 - Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

3. SERVE GOD AND OTHERS

- Humbly align their lives with the will of God, daily responding to God's call to be His holy servants on mission with Him
- Identify their spiritual gift(s) and utilize them for service in building up the Body of Christ and in demonstrating God's love to all people

John 12:26 - Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

4. SHARE JESUS CHRIST WITH OTHERS

- Understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ and clearly communicate the message in the power of the Holy Spirit in the course of everyday life
- Cross cultural and geographical barriers to develop relationships with people far from God, helping them to respond to God's love and to follow Jesus Christ
- Possess a biblical worldview energizing them as Christian citizens to impact their culture

Matthew 4:19 - “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

5. LIVE BY FAITH IN GOD

- Strengthened by an ever-increasing love of God and knowledge of His Word, they deepen their trust in God and joyfully give themselves and their resources to Him
- Persevere in life’s trials by trusting God to sustain them and to bring about His glorious purposes in and through their lives

Matthew 19:21 - Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

6. SEEK GOD IN WORSHIP

- Acknowledge God alone as worthy of worship, genuinely revering Him for His glory and His holiness
- Maintain a conversational relationship with God through various forms of prayer and worship, whether in private or in gatherings with God’s people
- Worship God by fully offering themselves to Him

John 4:23-24 - Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

7. BUILD CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS

- Live as followers of Christ in their families, resulting in healthy relationships, strong marriages and effective parenting
- Experience the love of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit through fellowship with other believers for mutual growth, encouragement, service and accountability in Christ
- Participate in the life of the local church, striving to enrich and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

John 13:34-35 - “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Early this week my blog will give you some resources to use in your quest for growth as a follower of Jesus Christ. Decide which of these seven categories that you need to grow in this year. The resources we provide will help you plan for your spiritual growth.

Remember Jesus is warning us against thoughtless discipleship. I want to challenge you to seriously plan to grow in your commitment as a follower of Jesus Christ.

ILLUSTRATION - When Julius Caesar landed on the shores of Britain with his Roman legions, he took a bold and decisive step to ensure that success of his military venture. Ordering his men to halt

on the edge of the Cliffs of Dover, he commanded them to look down at the water below. To their amazement, they saw every ship in which they had crossed the channel engulfed in flames. Caesar had deliberately cut off any possibility of retreat! Now that his soldiers were unable to return to the continent, there was nothing left for them to do but to advance and conquer! And that is exactly what they did.