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“Don't Just Wear the Cross” Luke 14:25-33

Introduction

“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. “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 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.” ” (Luke 14:25–35)

The key to unlocking this passage of Scripture is a word that appears three times—in verse 26, 27, and 33—the word “disciple!” This passage is a call to the crowds to become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ! This is not a call for Christians to take the next step and become some sort of post-graduate disciples of Jesus. It is not a call for saved but carnal Christians to dedicate their lives to God and become spiritual Christians somehow. First and foremost, this is a call to salvation! This is not a call to peripheral discipleship, it is call to become a real disciple of Jesus Christ!

A disciple is a student, a learner, a follower! Mathetes is the Greek word—a word that might be best understood in today's culture as “an apprentice”—someone who sits under the master craftsman or a master teacher and learns to do what he knows how to do with excellence!

This is not a call to just to follow anyone or someone exceptional. This is a call to by Jesus disciple—as seen by the personal pronoun “my.” Here is an invitation to a crowd who has been following Jesus for sometime to become true disciples of Him. It is a call that still is being issued today—to you and to me!

In a few minutes, I want to preach on three elements involved in this call, but before we do let's consider the context of this passage, the intended audience, and finally the overall theme of the passage. All of this by means of introduction.

This passage reaches back for its context all the way back to Luke 9:51, “ *When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.* ” (Luke 9:51). Jesus' hour, the time for his death, was soon approaching. He knows it. This is why He came—to die for the sins of His people, to give His life a ransom for many. The appointed time was now drawing near so he sets his face resolutely toward Jerusalem. In many ways he is at the apex of his ministry. He is well-known, influential and well sought after.

“Now great crowds accompanied him.” We are talking thousands of people are traveling with Jesus as he walks possibly through a region known as Perea which is still quite removed from Jerusalem.

- He has passed through a town in Samaria, a town which stiffed him
- He appoints 72 evangelists who go out preaching the gospel of repentance and they return with joy with the great blessing of God in their results.
- He interacts with various individuals who question him about his teaching
- He enters the home of some dear friends and eats with them
- The crowds begin to swell as he makes his way to Jerusalem and instruct his disciples and also castigates the religious leaders of his day who were full of hypocrisy
- More people joins the swelling crowd of uncommitted followers who are now number in the thousands and who are trampling over one another to hear Jesus.
- From Luke 12 to Luke 14 he teaches them almost continuously, only being interrupted a few times by questions from different individuals as well as opportunities to healing a woman with a disabled spirit and a man with a disabled body. Sometimes he is teaching the disciples, at other times he is speaking directly with the leaders of organized religion, but always the crowd is within earshot and he is teaching them. What does he teach them. Here are a few themes:
 - Get out of phony religion
 - Understand your life is an open book to a holy God and you are under His judgment
 - Fear God, confess Christ, believe His Spirit, abandon materialism, seek the kingdom, expect Christ to come in judgment, deny yourself, settle with God before it's too late, realize death is near and you can't control it and you're living on borrowed time. All of these are components of Jesus' evangelism.

Now immediately preceding our text, Jesus has addressed the religious leaders once again who he says are not going to be in His kingdom even though they think they are! They are like many religious people today—proud of their own religious heritage and tradition, committed to ceremonies, ritualism and satisfied with

their own religious achievements and moral goodness. In the story just before our passage he talks about a great banquet in which many guests were pre-invited, but they refused to come to the feast. He speaks here of the those who are committed to their own self-righteous, works-driven religion. Now he says, no one like that is going to be in my kingdom. *“For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”* (Luke 14:24)

That's the context. Next look at his intended audience—it is to anyone who wants to be his disciple. A disciple here is another word for a true Christian. The word itself is undergoing a metamorphosis involving a growing commitment to Jesus Christ. Some of his hearers were nominal followers, others were barely following him, some were totally uncommitted, some were true believers. But Jesus raises the bar in this passage and in clear terms lays out what is involved in being saved and following him. He lays out, absolute demands. His language is exclusive and seems extreme. There is no superficiality. This is what true salvation will cost you!

Finally, look at the core teaching or the theme. It has to do with truly following Christ or what we call salvation. And this is important to understand. Many who followed Christ in the crowd were not true believers! The difference could be illustrated by the crowd on Palm Sunday who called, “Hosanna” yet who just a few days later cried out “Crucify Him!” and those who on the day of Pentecost heard the message were cut to the heart and asked, “Sirs, what must we do to be saved!”

That is the question Jesus answers in this passage, “What must I do to be saved?” He answers it from different angles throughout the gospel of Luke. But you see “Salvation (Luke 7:50), being a disciple (14:26), entering God’s kingdom (18:24), having eternal life (18:18), eating bread in God’s kingdom (14:15), being acknowledged before God’s angels (12:8), and following Jesus (14:26) are different ways Luke expressed the same reality. . . . This theme, the cost of discipleship, is also found in Luke 9:23–27, 57–62; 18:24–30.” (Robert Stein)

This is call to salvation. A rescue from hell to heaven. This is not just some sort of emotional makeover, Jesus is calling for here. This is a call for an extreme takeover of your life. He is calling you and me in this passage to acknowledge Him as s overign Lord, divine dictator, ruler, controller and king of your life.

There is no easy salvation offered here. Never did Jesus call for a short, easy prayer to receive eternal life. There is no syrupy plea for an emotional decision, an easy forgiveness, an easy way to Heaven. No what we find here in Luke 14 and elsewhere is that coming to Christ is hard. It is hard to find eternal life, there are many distractions, there is a narrow gate, amazingly contrary to what you and I are used to. Jesus put up barrier after barrier, stopped them dead in their tracks Jesus wasn't trying to remove all the barriers and make it easy—no! He was doing He did everything He could to keep the tares out, to sift the chaff from the wheat. Never would He give anyone an easy way to secure a false sense of salvation.

In one sentence the teaching of this passage is that true salvation, true discipleship requires comprehensive disencumberment and cross bearing! It is a call to unconditional surrender.

John MacArthur writes on this passage, “The gospel is a call to sinners to submit everything to Jesus Christ. Simply, it is a call to find your life in death. It is a call to find your life by losing it, to gain it by abandoning it, to live it to the fullest by emptying it. There is no Christianity light in the Bible. There is no Christianity lite in the teaching of Jesus. Our Lord's words, frankly, weren't very friendly; they were frightening. They weren't even comforting; they were threatening. They weren't easy; they were hard.

Now there are three elements involved in this call to salvation or true discipleship in this text. Let him who has ears let him hear. First. . . .

We must surrender our personal relationships to Christ (v. 25-26)

“Now great crowds accompanied him, [they have been in the process of doing this and he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me [this is a condition that is assumed to be true—it is the essence of salvation—to come to Christ] and does not hate his own [his very own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters [all of whom he dearly loves, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

These verse speaks of death to one's own priorities and allegiances when it comes to your personal relationships. In the Near East, commitment to one's family superseded everyone other commitment. Jesus must become your #1 personal priority!

Now we need to understand what this word “hate” really means. And the best thing to do is to let Scripture be its own interpreter of itself. Some people think the word used here means “to dislike, detest, abhor or loathe.” But that is not the correct interpretation of this word “hate.”

Now, there is no doubt the word means “hate” but it is really a familiar Hebrew idiom [a word construction in that language] that means “to love less.” It means Your first love, your greatest love must be for Christ! When you come to Christ you will love him most and love all your family less than you love Him. In all things, including your relationships, Christ must have the preeminence. He must be your primary allegiance, not your family or anyone else!

In Genesis 29:31, Jacob is married to two wives: Rachel and Leah. We know that he loved Rachel. She was his first love! But we also know that he loved and cared for Leah who bore him many sons. But in describing this relationship, the Bible says, “*When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.*” (Genesis 29:31). Jacob didn't hate Leah, he simply loved her less. That is what the original author intended.

Over in Deuteronomy 21:15-17, it speaks again to the issue of polygamy—a man having two wives—one who is loved and one who is “unloved” or loved less. Same Hebrew idea.

Furthermore, we know Jesus isn't speaking of what we might think of literally as "hate" because from the time of Moses we are told that we are to honor our father and mother (Exodus 20:12) and this is repeated in Ephesians 6:1-3. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Wives are to love their husbands and so on. In fact, we are told to love our neighbors and even to love our enemies. So what Jesus is saying can't mean "hate" in the usual sense. Rather Jesus is conveying the idea that if you come to Christ, you must give him complete devotion, a type of loyalty that is so true and unswerving that every other relationship, even to your own life, is subject to it.

And one more idea seals this idea of loving less. It is a clear parallel passage to Luke 14. Turn to Matthew 10:34-37 where Jesus is directly instructing his twelve disciples.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:34-37)

Whereas Luke records Jesus saying, "you must hate your own father and mother", Jesus says here, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me. . . is not worthy of me." So to "hate" is to "love less." "Hate" and "love" in this context than are terms relating to priority and authority not emotion feeling. No one must compete with Christ in terms of your authority and priority!

It is similar to the idea of an immigrant to this country applying for U.S. Citizenship. When he or she becomes a citizen, they must renounce allegiance to this native land and take an oath to their new country. It is not that they hate their old country, but now they will love it less and love their new country more! This is a matter of allegiance.

It really doesn't matter anymore what you want. It doesn't matter anymore what I want. It doesn't matter what your desires, your ambitions, your goals, your objectives are for me. Frankly, it doesn't matter what mine have been. It's the end for you being the reigning authority in my life and frankly, it's the end for me being the reigning authority in my life. And, again, this is back to what Jesus has said numerous times. Deny yourself, deny yourself, deny yourself, hate yourself. And if you don't, you cannot be My disciple. Jesus is not offering "cheap grace"--either from what it cost God to secure your salvation nor from what it will cost you to follow Him. Half-hearted following is doomed.

We must surrender our personal desires and goals to Christ (v. 27)

Secondly, if you will come to Christ, you must surrender your personal desires and goals to Christ. *"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:27) Now again please understand what this verse means. The idea of bearing one's cross has been so culturalized and neutered today. We often speak of someone "bearing her own cross" in terms of the problems of life that she faces. "Bearing one's own cross" isn't about your problems, it's about your life's desires, authority, ambition, and goals! It is about death itself. Jesus says, *"If anyone would*

come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ” (Luke 9:23). And Paul testifies, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20).

Jesus doesn't make salvation easy here, does he. Salvation is simple in the sense that there are some basic truths that one understands and embraces one comes to Christ, but it hard to come to Christ, He makes some extreme demands. He tells us elsewhere that we are to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. That's a dominating, all-surpassing, supreme love. He doesn't want us just to wear our cross! He wants us to die on the cross. Be nailed to it.

Salvation involves a severe alteration of your life. It reverses, redefines, redirects how we view our closest relationships, our possessions, our stuff, our own lives. Paul testified that when he understood the surpassing value of knowing Christ and being found in Christ through salvation, that he counted everything else as manure—dung! That's self-abandonment! You don't just wear the cross in salvation. You are nailed to it!

This explains why Jesus dealt with the rich young ruler so strongly when he told him that to enter into the kingdom of God he must first go and sell all that he had. He wasn't telling him he must do that literally. Rather he was saying, you can't get saved at one point with the understanding that you can maintain your own personal desires and goals above Christ's at that same point. To do is idolatry. You can't receive Christ with your one hand and hold on to your idolatry and your self-autonomy with the other. Now certainly, there is a growth curve in the Christian life—where God reveals sin to you—but you can't come to Christ and still be cherishing known sin in your life. You have to repent from sin and turn to Christ.

Jesus does not want to be some decoration in your life. He doesn't want you to treat him as if he some add-on module to your computer's web browser, some elective in your studies, or some extra topping on top of your banana split dreams.

No, Jesus said, you have to lose your life! You have to consider yourself and your will and your ambition and your desire and your purposes as minor, miniscule, and unimportant compared to what honors Christ. Following Christ means saying “no” to many things and acknowledging Christ as everything. He isn't just one among many things. He is the Lord of all things. The essence of everything at the cost of anything.

As John MacArthur has said, “Salvation is not about Jesus giving you what you want. It is about you dying. It will cost your plans and desires.” Jesus is not offering you heaven on earth! He's promises heaven in heaven. On this earth, we will have tribulations, persecutions, and suffering! We will have to die daily, take up our cross and follow Him. If we don't, we can't be his disciple.

In Jesus' day, the Roman's system of crucifixion involved two pieces of wood. There was the main cross and then the crossbeam which formed the “T”. The upright part of

the cross was placed on a plot of ground where people regularly passed. It was a daily reminder that death would come to those who rebelled against Rome or committed a death-deserving crime. But then there was the cross-beam which was nonetheless fairly heavy. And after a person was condemned to die by the Roman legal authority, they would be handed this cross-beam and they would carry it to the place of crucifixion, be nailed to it and the rest of the cross which had been lowered to the ground and then raised up on that cross to die. This is what Jesus endured when he died for our sin. Thus “to carry one's cross” meant you were going to die. You were no longer free to do what you wanted to do. You were under another authority whose will was law.

My friend, are you willing to lose your life for Christ? Are you willing to say that death to your desires and goals and dreams is gain? If you lose your life, you will find it. Your sins will be forgiven. It will be worth it all when you see Jesus in heaven!

Now, I know this is hard! It's hard to believe! But Jesus said these things clearly. Elsewhere in John we read, “*When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”*” (John 6:60) “*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,*” (John 6:66–68)

We must surrender our personal possessions to Christ (vv. 28-33)

Following Jesus means we must surrender our personal relationships to him. We must relinquish authority to Christ in the area of our personal goals and desires as well. And then lastly we must surrender our personal possessions to Christ. Again, there is no cheap grace. Following Christ, being saved by His grace, is costly. Jesus tells a pair of parables [stories with a purposeful truth] and then lays out this last principle.

“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.” (Luke 14:28–33)

Oh, what Jesus does here is so different than what you may be used to in Americanized Christianity. Jesus does not solicit a hasty, emotional decision. Instead, he urges those who would follow him to think seriously, to “count the cost” (14:28; cf. 9:57–62). Perseverance (8:15; 21:19) will result only after sober consideration of the cost of following Jesus. The section concludes with another condition of discipleship. Along with willingness to place him above family and life, Jesus also calls his followers to surrender their possessions.

To drive home the point, he talks about a man who, in his day, **wanted to build a tower**. This was likely either a **watchtower** in his field so that he could see if his enemies were invading his land, setting fire to his crops, or just trespassing and stealing from him. Or it could have a **storage** for grain. Either way, the whole community was going to know what he was up to—a very visible building project.

The culture of the ancient near east was primarily a culture of **honor and shame**. High priority on maintaining your honor and not bringing shame to yourself or to your family. So, this man would first sit down and count the cost making sure if he started building this thing (which is far different than say remodeling your basement or bathroom which few people would see), he could complete, because if he didn't everyone would mock him. He would shame himself and his family. The talk of the town would “this man wasn't able to finish what he started.” He would be the laughingstock of the town.

That's the **story of the rash builder**—a purely **voluntary** act. He didn't have to build. He chose to do so. But then there is the story of the **reasonable king**. He has to make a decision because he is being attacked by another army that is twice the size of his own force. He has got to go out and meet them. The threat has to be answered. But before he goes against 2:1 odds, a wise king will sit down, think through the battle plans and if he believes his side is going to get slaughtered, he will wisely sue for peace.

What is Jesus teaching by these stories. Well, first He tells you that **coming to Christ and following Him involves a cost!** And you need to count it. Being a Christian isn't a bed of roses. “*For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*” (Matthew 7:14) “*In the world you will have tribulation.*” (John 16:33). So consider carefully what it means to be a Christian.

Jesus isn't calling for some **emotionally-driven or emotionally-manipulated decision** here. He wants you to count the cost. That doesn't mean you earn salvation somehow. But rather, you must understand that following Jesus means that you surrender your personal relationships, your possessions, and your desires to Him. He is LORD! You must die to what has dominated your life, controlled your life to this point.

And you have to make a decision of some kind like this king did. You either have to fight or sue for peace. And the truth is we are sinners who already are in this war spiritually. Everyone is. From the moment we are born, we are sinners. We aren't morally neutral. We are rebels against God. **Neutrality is impossible**. But we can sue for peace with God. We can be and should seek to be reconciled to God. This is reasonable, wise and sensible. And this is exactly what Jesus teaches when he is on the earth. “*And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way,*

lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.” ” (Luke 12:57–59) Likewise he warns us, “*No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*” ” (Luke 13:5)

Coming to Christ is the most important thing you will ever do. More important than any building project! More important than any war you will encounter. And so the Lord says, “You want to be my disciple? You can be but you must surrender—surrender all your priorities in terms of relationship, wants, and possessions.

“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce [give up] all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33). D. A. Carson writes that this speaks “to the abandonment of things, yielding up the right of ownership, rather than outright disposal of them. The disciple of Jesus may be given the use of things in trust, as a stewardship, but they are no longer his own. The present tense implies that what Jesus requires in relation to possessions is a continual attitude of abandonment.” Or as I said much earlier in the message it is the idea of disencumberment!

Following Jesus is an issue of your allegiance to relationships, your assessment of priorities and your abandonment attitude toward things.

As John MacArthur puts it memorably, “You become a steward of everything and an owner of nothing. What you're saying is, I don't have any relationships that aren't subordinated to your Lordship. I don't have any self-interests that aren't subordinated to your Lordship.” You subordinate every other relationship to the one you have with Christ. You subordinate your desires to His. You subordinate your belongings to His kingdom. You hold nothing firmly in this world, but you are willing to give it up for Him—whether that be family, plans, or money. And you don't give it up so that you can earn salvation! You give it up because Jesus is LORD!

But we never can prove the delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favor He shows, for the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet.
Or we'll walk by His side in the way.
What He says we will do, where He sends we will go;
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Then Jesus ends by saying these words: “*“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 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.”* ” (Luke 14:34–35).

Salt has many functions. In Jesus' day salt main purposes was preservation and flavor enhancement. We can't conceive of salt, as we know it, losing its taste. But the interesting fact is that there was at least one source of salt in Israel in ancient times that came out of the Dead Sea and it was the salt that was rather severely compromised with gypsum. It had another name then, but it was gypsum, basically. And if it wasn't processed right, the salt that came from the Dead Sea that had that chemical sort of compound of gypsum with it, if it wasn't processed right, it could begin to diminish in its effectiveness as salt. And it would literally become tasteless. And then it couldn't do its job. It would cease being what it was. It would cease to be able to preserve. It would lose its potential. It would lose its usefulness.

And if that happened, **the salt was worse than worthless**. It had a **negative value**. It became an **environmental hazard**. You wouldn't throw it out in your field because it would ruin the soil. You wouldn't even throw it on your manure pile. In fact, sowing your conquered lands with salt after you defeated your enemy was the ultimate punishment in that day.

All you can do with “saltless” salt is throw it away which was Jesus' way to speak of judgment. The language is absolute here and final. Anyone who just temporary follows Jesus and doesn't truly become his disciple will be cast into judgment. Jesus talks about weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, fire, brimstone, all language that speaks of eternal judgment. Don't start following Me until you're ready to repent, surrender your personal relationships, desires, and possessions to Me, until you are ready to give me your full allegiance.

“He who has ears, let him hear!” Are you willing to hear this call to salvation? Are you willing to respond?”

Now why was Jesus able to make such demands of us? What makes him different than Bhudda, Muhammed, or some other religious leader? These words tell us something about Him—**He is the very Son of God! He is God of very God! He is LORD, master, supreme authority!** And if you don't acknowledge that on this earth while you live, you will acknowledge it one day. Now you can come to Him as Savior. If you don't, you will meet Him as Ultimate and Final Judge on another day! And you will be cast out!

So, **please, listen to Christ this day!** God has spoken in His Word. Jesus calls you to follow Him! He calls on each one of us to forsake our sin, take up our cross daily and follow Him. **Hear Him! Believe in Him! Trust Him!** It is costly! But it is also joy-producing in this life and forevermore! Will you count the cost and follow Jesus? Will you take up your cross or just wear your cross this Palm Sunday? Is Jesus Christ the essence of everything or just one of many things in your life?