

Sermon: Qualifications for Discipleship

Text: Luke 14:25-35

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Introduction: It needs to be made clear that everyone is invited to be a disciple of Jesus. And if we decide to learn from Jesus, to follow him; we must have a teachable and willing spirit. We must try our best with his help to meet his demands, expectations, and requirements. It is not so much that *we* must count the cost of what we are willing to do, but we must accept the cost already paid out by God in Jesus. Jesus speaks to the large crowds (v. 25) following him. He needs to find out who is serious about the Kingdom.

So close to Jerusalem and his eventual crucifixion:

I. Jesus Has Demands of His Disciples (vv. 26-27, 33).

Luke 14:26-27, 33 (NIV) 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. ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ³³In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

A. We are to hate our family.

Of course, Jesus is using hyperbole here. He is employing exaggerated speech to make his point. Yet, Jesus is absolutely serious about the kind of mindset it will take to follow him and not just follow after him. The word (μισέω) used here literally means to hate, detest, abhor. “To hate is a Semitic expression meaning to turn away from, to detach oneself from.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 181.

Jesus is never found trying to soften the requirements, but to screen out half-hearted folk. Jesus is saying that the love *he* requires is so much greater than what a person has for his parents, children or siblings.

In the first century, and even today, a decision to follow Christ can result in alienation, job loss, even personal danger. Jews, Muslims, and other religious groups will count you as “dead to them,” or maybe even kill you, if you become a disciple of Jesus.

The other side of this is: as Christians we cannot allow non-Christians to determine our level of commitment and involvement with Christ and his Church. For Jesus there can be no more important relationship than the one we have with him. Family is important, but not at the expense of one's salvation.

B. We are to carry our cross.

Everyone in Jesus' time knew what "carrying a cross" meant. When you saw a person carrying his cross, you knew he was on his way to die. Early members of the church who would not worship Caesar knew they might die (literally) for not bowing down to the emperor.

Jesus is not talking about the things we might put up with like a dead-end job, a chronic ailment or a less-than-perfect spouse. What he is talking about literally is dying to self and sin, and doing whatever is necessary to follow Jesus.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for Passover (**Luke 9:51**) along with those in the crowd. But how many would be willing to do what he would do? Regarding the crowd, they may have been like the story of the ten lepers (Thielicke, *The Waiting Father*, p. 154). "Jesus healed all ten of them. And health and healing are also a gift of God...But the great majority did not thank him for it. This means, does it not, that they loved their health more than the Saviour who gave it to them. He was just good enough to cure their wounds for them. As long as they were in misery they ran after him, whimpering and begging him to help them."

The irony was they were now no longer unclean and were free to worship, and still they chose not to worship God who had healed them.

C. We are to give (up) everything.

Too many people try to stand in/with the world and also in/with Christ. It is not possible because the world has different values, and a different agenda.

I John 2:15-17 (NIV) ¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Jesus calls us out of a world that is passing away. I like the way Juan Carlos Ortiz tells the story of The Pearl of Great Price. A man sees this pearl and says to the merchant, “I want this pearl. How much is it?” The seller says, “It’s very expensive.” “How much?” “A lot!” “Well, do you think I could buy it?” the man asks. “Oh, yes,” says the merchant, “everyone can buy it.” “But I thought you said it was very expensive.” “I did.” “Well, how much?” “Everything you have,” says the seller. “All right, I’ll buy it.” “Okay, what do you have?” “Well, I have \$10,000 in the bank.” “Good, \$10,000. What else?” “That’s all I have.” “Nothing more?” “Well, I have a few dollars more in my pocket.” “How much?” “Let’s see ... \$100.” “That’s mine, too,” says the seller. “What else do you have?” “That’s all, nothing else.” “Where do you live?” the seller asks. “In my house. Yes, I own a home.” The seller writes down, “house.” “It’s mine.” “Where do you expect me to sleep—in my camper?” “Oh, you have a camper, do you? That, too. What else?” “Am I supposed to sleep in my car?” “Oh, you have a car?” “Yes, I own two of them.” “They’re mine now.” “Look, you’ve taken my money, my house, my camper, and my cars. Where is my family going to live?” “So, you have a family?” “Yes, I have a wife and three kids.” “They’re mine now.” Suddenly the seller exclaims, “Oh, I almost forgot! *You* yourself, too! Everything becomes mine—wife, children, house, money, cars, and you, too.” Then he goes on, “Now, listen, I will allow you to use all these things for the time being. But don’t forget that they’re all mine, just as you are. And whenever I need any of them, you must give them up, because I am now the owner.”(Adapted from *The Disciple* [Creation House], pp. 34-35.)

II. Jesus Has Expectations of His Disciples (vv. 28-32)

Luke 14:28-32 (NIV) 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? ²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 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? ³²If 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.

Jesus shares two parables here that talk about the vital importance of completing what a person starts, and being there at the end. Jesus is saying: are you sure you want to follow me? Just like Jesus:

A. We are expected to finish goals.

We all have unfinished projects. We all have seen construction sites abandoned when resources ran out. People lose heart and quit what they were once passionate about. We have all seen newlyweds with love in their eyes voicing vows of fidelity later arguing over who gets the dog and cat as they go their separate ways.

Jesus is saying: “it is not how you start, but how you finish that counts.” It is easy sometimes to say I will or I do, but what God is looking for are people who can say, “I did.” The word “to finish” (εκτελεσαι) is a form of the word that Jesus used on the cross when he said: “it is finished” (John 19:30).

Walking with Christ there will be difficulties along the way. There will be challenges just like what the early disciples faced and sometimes failed at. Peter started well with a great deal of enthusiasm confessing Jesus as Messiah, but later he denied him. Yet that was not the end. He recovered, was forgiven and finished well. Origen once said, “He who is near me, is near the fire; he who is far from me, is far from the Kingdom.” - Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 196

B. We are expected to weigh outcomes.

Spiritually we are at war in this world. There are two leaders, the King of kings and the prince of this world. One needs to weigh the possible outcomes. Some bet their lives and sign up on the losing side, while others make the better decision. You have to know what you are doing and committing to. That is why I will study with anyone who wishes to become a soldier in Christ’s army.

Many times we find ourselves in spiritual battles that are dangerous. Being a Christian means being outnumbered, but just like Gideon of the OT, if God is with you, you will win. Even though Sennecherib vastly outnumbered Jerusalem, he woke up with 125,000 dead soldiers around him because God was not on his side. We will win with God, but Jesus says it is not for the faint-hearted.

Life is like out in Galilee where enthusiasm is high and commitment comes easily where the crowds are large, but when we arrive in Jerusalem and the followers thin out, there comes a question: “Are you one of his disciples?”

III. Jesus Has Requirements of His Disciples (vv. 34-35)

Luke 14:34-35 (NIV) ³⁴“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

A. We are required to be useful.

True or genuine salt (pure) does not lose its saltiness unless it is mixed or contaminated with other substances. “People who lived around the Dead Sea regularly saw white crystals that formed around this body of water due to evaporation. Some of these crystals were true salt, while others just looked like it and were really just gypsum (which was either bitter or stale tasting).” - Serendipity, *Parables*, p. 43

The actual point is we dare not just look like followers, we need to be useful. We need to help preserve the world. If not, our fate is the end of everything that has lost its usefulness. We, too, will be cast aside, disposed of. The challenge is to stay pure and do the work we were designed to do.

“Under pressures both open and subtle, pressures all of us know, salt does not decide to become pepper; it just gradually loses its savor. The process can be so gradual, in fact, that no one really notices. Well, almost no one.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 183

B. We are required to listen.

Jesus says here: “**He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**” Where else do we hear that kind of talk besides the parables? We hear it seven times regarding the churches in Revelation. Jesus knows that walking the way of the cross, giving up everything to follow him, will not be easy. Sometimes it will be easy to lose heart and give up, yet there is a day when we also can say “it is finished,” and feel a sense of accomplishment because we will have run the course laid out for us.

Revelation 13:8-10 (NIV) ⁸All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. ⁹He who has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Conclusion: “Jesus calls us into a relationship, not just a decision. As a learner, a disciple enters into relationship with Jesus and joins a lifetime journey of learning.” - Bock, *Luke*, p. 404

It begins by giving one’s complete self away to the will of God through Jesus Christ. Yet this disciple will be under constant renovation, always trying to improve his walk with the Lord. Every day we should be giving more and more of ourselves to what the Lord wants. It is an ongoing process.

Hebrews 10:14 (NIV) ¹⁴because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

A man is called separately. He is singled out. It is his decision to stand with Christ. This is a choice he makes alone, not for anyone else and not because of anyone else. A lot of people fear solitude and being alone. Even though it is more difficult to act/live alone, and easier to vote with the group, Jesus calls us, as individuals, to become *his* follower.

(see Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, p. 105ff.)

After everything Jesus has done and for everything he gives us, he only asks that we be as committed to him as he is to us.