

## **Luke 14:25-35** **Exacting Discipleship**

I am not a fan of home improvement shows. They tend to cost me money. But really, what I don't like is that they make everything look so easy. All you have to do is a few little changes and, suddenly, you have a brand new house. It never works that way in reality. It always costs more and takes longer than it ought. And in the end, it never really looks quite like it did on TV.

The same is true of salvation. People are not a quick fix. We do not need just a little makeover - a bit of touching up here and there. That is not what the gospel says. We are seriously damaged and need to be rebuilt entirely. There is no part of us that is good. Every aspect of our nature is corrupted by sin. God must start afresh if He is to make anything of us. That is why salvation is so much more than a quick, short prayer. Jesus never called for that.

Instead, Jesus made it quite clear what was involved in salvation. He said that "the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14). He reminded them that "not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Jesus said "from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three" (Luke 12:52). He told His disciples to "sell your possessions and give to charity" (Luke 12:33). Ultimately, Jesus reminded His disciples that "if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

We must remember that the gospel is God-centered, not man-centered. It calls for self-sacrifice, not self-fulfillment. It insists upon placing others first and dying to self. Ultimately, it is not about us, but about God.

When we think of discipleship, most of us return to the Great Commission. The charge Jesus gave to His disciples was straightforward. They, and we, were to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). In today's passage in Luke, and elsewhere, Jesus explained what that meant. That is, He told us what it meant to be a disciple. He defined the term. Originally the word, *mathetes*, simply described a student. In Jewish culture, rabbis, whether itinerant or attached to a local synagogue, would teach and their disciples (students) would listen. To those rabbis who traveled, commitment was more difficult, since it often involved the hardship of travel including the separation from family and friends.

That was the kind of rabbi Jesus was. As He traveled around the villages of Galilee, then north into the area around Tyre and Sidon, and then on into Perea and Judea, many people followed. But there was a great difference among them as to their level of commitment, or discipleship. Some were fully committed, others were simply curious. And there was every possible variety in between. As Jesus progressed nearer to His passion, He made it clearer and clearer as to what He meant by being a disciple. This was why many left Him, "as a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66).

Within a few decades, the word disciple had become interchangeable with the word Christian, "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). It simply meant those who believed in

Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Today the words continue to be used interchangeably. That, in itself, is not a problem. It does, however, mean that we must search Scripture to make certain we understand what Jesus meant when He spoke of discipleship, since if that is what it means to be a Christian, we ought to be attentive to it. This passage is not an exhaustive account of the requirements of discipleship. Yet, it does lay down three principles that ought not to be considered optional for those who would consider themselves Christians.

### **Context and Audience**

While the exact time and location are not mentioned by Luke, the context suggests that Jesus was still in Perea (possibly) and was making His way to Jerusalem. Luke writes that “large crowds were going along with Him” (v. 25). Though Scripture is not specific, it is reasonable to assume that many of these had heard the recent teachings of Jesus in His encounters with the Pharisees. It was rather likely that many had, and that was the reason for their following Jesus further.

These people, then, had heard Jesus challenge the Pharisees as to their self-righteousness and confidence in the Law. Remember Jesus’ command to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). Using a parable of a great banquet that was ignored by the invitees, Jesus insisted that “none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner” (Luke 14:24). That is, the Pharisees would be shut out of the kingdom of God eternally.

In terms of the audience, some commentators insist that this passage was not evangelistic in nature, but rather was a scene in which Jesus was speaking only to His disciples. They argue that Jesus was calling His disciples to turn from being carnal Christians to something more, as in the context of 1 Corinthians 3:1 “and I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.”

While this may be the case, it seems, though, that this is very much an invitation to salvation. First of all, Luke mentions the large crowds and does not, in his narrative, suggest that Jesus moved Himself and His disciples away from them to have this particular conversation. While it is true that Jesus had generally stopped preaching to the masses, this does not imply that He had sworn off that activity entirely. True, He was more focused on His disciples as He neared the cross, but Jesus was always willing to save sinners. That was why He had come, “to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). In fact, even at the end Jesus was willing to save.

“<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, ‘are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’ <sup>40</sup>But the other answered, and rebuking him said, ‘do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup>And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ <sup>42</sup>And he was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’ <sup>43</sup>And He said to him, ‘truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise’” (Luke 23:39-43).

There is no reason to think Jesus was not addressing the crowd and inviting them to discipleship.

### **A Disciple Must Change Priorities**

With so many people following Him, Jesus must have wondered what they were looking for. As ever, Jesus took the initiative. “<sup>25</sup>He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>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” (v. 25-26). The people must have stopped in their tracks and looked at Him with astonishment. What brought this on? Why such a stern command? What could He possibly mean?

Had not Jesus taught, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44)? Was not one of the greatest commandments to “honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Exodus 20:12)? Why this talk of hate? Why now must we hate those whom we ought to love most of all?

Clearly Jesus was using an expression that was not to be taken literally. Jesus was simply using an expression that was familiar to His audience. It was a colloquial way of speaking. Consider Malachi 1:2-3, “<sup>2</sup>I have loved you,’ says the Lord. But you say, ‘how have You loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares the Lord. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob; <sup>3</sup>but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.’” Did God literally hate Esau? Of course not. God was expressing His sovereign choice of Jacob as the heir of the promise given to Abraham. Consider when the Lord said to Jacob,

“<sup>11</sup>I am God Almighty;

Be fruitful and multiply;

A nation and a company of nations shall come from you,

And kings shall come forth from you.

<sup>12</sup>The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,

I will give it to you,

And I will give the land to your descendants after you” (Genesis 35:11-12).

In the same way, when Scripture says “the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren” (Genesis 29:31) it means that Jacob merely preferred Rachel to Leah, not that he did not care for her. The Law even made provision for such situations,

“<sup>15</sup>If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, <sup>16</sup>then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the firstborn before the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn. <sup>17</sup>But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn” (Deuteronomy 21:15-17).

Jesus had warned that following Him would require difficult choices. “<sup>51</sup>Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; <sup>52</sup>for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup>They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12:51-53).

To hate in this case simply meant to love less. For a Jew to follow Jesus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century would be a very significant act. No doubt many in their family would not approve. Many of their friends would cut them off. Such emotional heartache was difficult in the best of times. Jesus warned those who chose to follow Him that such would be the case with them. They had to make a choice. They had to change their

priorities. “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37).

It is a matter of what is most important. To whom do our first loyalties lie. When a person becomes a citizen of a new country, they must renounce their old citizenship. They can still love their former country and enjoy its culture (food, clothing, etc.) but their allegiance must be to the new. So it must be with a disciple of Christ. If we must quarrel with our loved ones over the things of God, then quarrel we must.

It is prudent to remember that if someone must be offended, let it not be Christ. Jesus warned, “for whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26). We do not want that. We do not want Jesus to be ashamed of us when He returns because we were unwilling to give our devotion to Him priority over offending our friends and family. Besides, it is not loving to allow our family and friends to perish eternally. We do them no favors by holding back the truth of Scripture. They will not thank us from hell because we were unwilling to offend them on earth.

More than family and friends, a true disciple must hate “even his own life” (v. 26). Again, context and linguistic convention demand that we not take this to mean that we are commanded to suicide. Simply put, we must place our devotion to Jesus above our devotion to ourselves. It is about self-denial. And the extent to which this self-denial must extend is that “whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (v. 27). There are no half-measures. Our obedience must be absolute.

Jesus continued this thought when He said, “so then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (v. 33). Notice that the command is not to give the Lord a tithe, or some other percentage of our worldly goods. We are to put all of our resources at His command. We are to hold nothing back for ourselves. The word *apotasso* means to say goodbye to. Again, it is not to be taken to literally mean that a disciple must become a pauper and that anyone who owns something cannot be a true Christian. It simply means that we can no longer love the world as we once did. We must no longer put our pleasure before serving the Lord.

It is about stewardship. Despite our self-delusions, we really own nothing. We have nothing. All that we think we own - our money, homes, cars, possessions, even our life - it not really ours. We have it only because we have been given it as a gift. We can keep it no longer that the giver of that gift, God, allows. We cannot even accept our worldly goods as if we earned them, because even our ability to work hard and be productive is a gift from God. We are merely stewards of all we think we possess, and the sooner we come to realize that, and live accordingly, the more quickly we move along the path of discipleship.

### **A Disciple Must Consider the Price**

Jesus continued by giving two illustrations consideration required in becoming a disciple. Such commitment requires sacrifice. Jesus had said as much. As such sacrifice ought to not be taken on without due consideration. It will be difficult. Jesus had said “strive to enter through the narrow door;

for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24). That many would try and not be able ought to give anyone considering a life of discipleship pause.

In the first illustration, there is a man who wanted “to build a tower” (v. 28). This may have been either a watchtower for protection or perhaps a tower in which to store his goods. In either case, the tower was a large building easily seen by all around. It was an undertaking that would require resources both financial and physical. Its progress would be monitored by all in the area. It was only sensible that the builder ought first to “sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it” (v. 28). After all, if the man has “laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him” (v. 29). The mocking and public humiliation would be incessant. In this shame-based culture the half-finished tower would remain as a constant reminder of his failure to plan. His children would live in its shadow. It would haunt him for the rest of his days.

The second illustration was equally powerful. In this case a king has set “out to meet another king in battle” (v. 31). Whether provoked or not, at some point the king realizes He is outnumbered. Only a fool would “not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand” (v. 31). Only a foolish king would not assess the situation and see if the terrain, weapons, and strategy would not allow him to win. If such was not the case, it would be prudent to send “a delegation and asks for terms of peace” (v. 32). It would be foolish to rush into a battle you could not possibly win.

The point of both illustrations was the same. Jesus did not call for an emotional, unthinking response to His claim to be the Messiah. He wanted His disciples to make a clear, thoughtful decision. Jesus knew that a quick, rash action would not last. A superficial response is often transient. It does not persevere. Remember the parable of the sower,

“<sup>13</sup>Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. <sup>14</sup>The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:23-24).

There are two reasons to be sober-minded when becoming a disciple. First, our foe is formidable, “be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The world, and the ruler of this world will be against us from the start. He is unrelenting. He is determined. And he has nothing to lose.

Second the cost is considerable. We must give up our sins. We must give up our self-righteousness. We must give up our ease. Perhaps the best way to reflect on the genuineness of our repentance is to consider our motives. What is it we want from our Savior? Do we follow Christ because of what He can do for us now, or because of your desperate need for a Savior. Do we think that if we make a profession of faith our lives will get better (relationally, financially, professionally, etc.)? Do we really consider that it is far more likely our lives will get worse? If we do not consider this, we are likely to fall away at the first hardship. This is why, I think, Christ says to count the cost? We are at war, and no one wants to go into battle with someone who will flee at the first shot.

### **A Disciple Must Comply with the Purpose**

Jesus concluded His talk with a curious expression. “<sup>34</sup>Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? <sup>35</sup>It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (v. 34-35). While this might seem unrelated to the lesson about counting the cost, clearly Jesus’ use of the word ‘therefore’ indicates that He wanted the ideas linked. Disciples have a purpose to fulfill.

In the classical world, salt was incredibly valuable. Along the trade routes of sub-Saharan Africa it was literally worth its weight in gold. They were exchanged equally. To the Jews, it was associated with the covenants and sacrifices, “every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (Leviticus 2:13).

Salt, itself, does not degrade, but if contaminated it can degrade rather rapidly. This often happened to salt taken from the Dead Sea since the soil there was laced with gypsum. If the gypsum was not properly removed during processing, the salt would lose its properties. It would then become useless both as a preservative and as a flavor enhancer. It was simply discarded.

The connection with the cost of discipleship is that Jesus does not want followers who will fade away. True discipleship lasts. The commitment is unconditional and, therefore, unending. While there will undoubtedly be failures and missteps along the way, the true disciple perseveres until welcomed home in eternity. And until then, we must be about our Savior’s business.

“<sup>13</sup>You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

<sup>14</sup>You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; <sup>15</sup>nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup>Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).

If we are true disciples. If we have aligned our priorities and counted the cost, then we must get to work. Like our Savior, “we must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day” (John 9:4). Like Him we must be willing to leave everything behind and count it all as lost for the greater cause of the kingdom of God. We must place Christ above our families, our possessions, and even ourselves. We must do so soberly, reflecting on the earthly troubles such a decision will bring. We must do so knowing that we are expected to finish what we began. God will cooperate. He will do His part in “that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). We must be ready to do ours.

It is interesting that once it has lost its integrity, salt can never become salty again. It is a lesson for us to reflect upon. For believers, it is difficult to regain our saltiness once we have been corrupted by the world. “<sup>4</sup>For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6). No one

can be harder to reach. They have heard it all. They have not sinned from ignorance. They have walked away from Christ with their eyes open. It is a lesson to us all as we consider the exacting discipleship required by Jesus.

**Takeaways**

Let us prayerfully reflect on and recommit ourselves to being true disciples, in every sense of the word, as Jesus defined the term.