

## Week 9 – The Cost of Discipleship – Luke 14:25-35

### Scripture Reading: Mark 8:34-38

#### Introduction

“Too good to be true” scams abound – especially on the internet – and we’re all tempted by them – at least a little bit...

*Drink a cup of this miracle concoction every night before bed and watch the pounds melt away while you sleep*

*Use this piece of exercise equipment for just 10 minutes a day and become physically fit without even breaking a sweat*

*Receive an all-expenses-paid vacation or some other valuable gift just for listening to our sales pitch – no pressure*

*“Hello, I’m a Nigerian prince who is looking for an honest person to help me get \$20 million out of Nigeria and I will give you 30% - all I need is for you to send me your bank account information, your Social Security number, and your signature and we can make the transfer into your account within 7 days”*

Just this past week, Kathy and I ran into one of these scams when we listed our fold-down camper for sale on Craigslist

Almost immediately I received a text message from someone using a Minnesota phone number asking if the camper was still available and asking me to email them – of course, I got kind of excited at the quick response

And when I replied they emailed back saying they would send me a check for more than our asking price sight unseen and send someone to pick up the camper once the check cleared

When I wrote back that I would only accept cash the email exchange ended before I was able to see just exactly how I was being set up – but I have no doubt that it was a setup designed to defraud me in some way

Especially since I received another similarly worded inquiry two days later from a different email address

All of those examples show us the old saying is still accurate – **“If something seems too good to be true, it probably is”**

But the reason these kinds of scams abound is because most of us deep down want something for nothing – or at the very least we want a whole lot for very little

Our parable this morning is a bit different in its presentation compared to those we’ve looked at so far

But in it, Jesus uses some common, easy to understand imagery from earthly life to make a spiritual point

And since we know that the definition of a parable is to place an unknown thing alongside something that is known in order to make the unknown known we see that our passage is indeed a parable

We will be considering Jesus’ teaching on the cost of true discipleship this morning from **Luke 14:25-35**

Let me encourage you to turn to the passage in your Bible and follow along as I read the passage in its entirety

*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.”*

In this parable, we are met with an attitude on the part of Jesus that seems somewhat counterintuitive to our usual evangelistic approach

**Verse 25** tells us that Jesus was being followed by “*great crowds*” which would seem to be a good thing since we tend to measure ministry success by size these days

But, on the surface, Jesus seems bound and determined to drive people away with some hard truths that seem very difficult to reconcile with the idea that salvation is a free gift of God’s abundant grace

What Jesus is attempting to make clear to his disciples and to us is that it’s possible for a person to be a “casual” follower without actually being a true Christ-follower and that being a casual follower isn’t going to cut it in the end

**It didn’t take long for Jesus to develop a throng of followers**

After all, he was out there doing miracles of physical healing and feeding multitudes and raising the dead; he astounded people with his knowledge and his insights and he was a radical departure from the accepted religious status quo

He was something new and different so it would have been very exciting to have been in his presence and to witness those kinds of things –

AND if he proved to be the Messiah the crowd no doubt figured they would naturally be a part of his coming kingdom

**People are often drawn to a new thing when it starts up and is the place to be but all too often the excitement is short-lived – especially when things get tough – and many great beginnings turn out to be just a flash in the pan**

And Jesus knew that some of those who claimed to be his disciples were only following him for selfish or superficial reasons and they really didn’t understand what being his disciple meant

So to avoid the charge of being a con artist Jesus sought to educate the crowd by spelling out what was required to be a true follower of him

And Jesus showed that while salvation is free it isn’t cheap and that Christianity comes at a cost to those who accept it

**I don’t believe Jesus did this to dissuade people from following him but to turn those casual clingers into true disciples who knew the terms of the bargain they were entering into**

So, in **verses 26, 27, and 33** Jesus shared some **difficult truths** that everyone who is considering being a Christ-follower needs to understand

Then in **verses 28-32** he gave two illustrations showing the kind of **frank deliberations** that a person who is considering following Christ should undertake

And then he wraps up the passage with a **final warning** in **verses 34-35**

So, let’s begin by looking at what difficult truths Jesus lays on the crowd that was following him:

# I. Difficult Truths

## A. Must value Christ above all other relationships

First, he says in **verse 26** –

*“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters...he cannot be my disciple”*

There are some things we need to unpack here so we can be sure to understand what Jesus meant

First, we come to the word “*hate*” and we instantly think it’s awful that Jesus would use it in conjunction to our feelings for our “*father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters*”

The idea that we must hate our own families who we actually love is shocking

And Jesus said it in order to shock his hearers into paying attention and to make them think about what he was saying

In phrasing it as he did, Jesus is letting it be known in no uncertain terms that our love for him must be so great that any feelings we have for anyone else will look like hatred by comparison

And that includes the feelings we have for those we hold dearest – we must love them so much less than we love the Lord that any one seeing it would think we hate them

**Unfortunately, far too many Christians today worship at the altar of the family and family commitments and involvements trump all others**

And we need to call it what it is – **idolatry**

Because anything that gets in the way of our allegiance and our duty to the Lord is idolatry

And as we see in **Matthew 22:37** the greatest commandment of all is to give God 100% of our devotion

**Now listen to what I’m saying – there is nothing inherently wrong with family**

God created the family and it is a good thing but often the greatest threat to the best thing is a second-best thing

Very few of us are tempted to put something that we know to be bad or even inherently inferior upon the throne of our hearts but many of us have elevated our family to a position it was never meant to occupy

And if we want to be a true follower we cannot let our allegiance to family usurp Christ’s rightful place in our lives

**In comparison to the love and allegiance we have for Jesus the love we have for our families must appear to be hatred**

## B. Must die to self

That’s a hard teaching and we may well recoil from it just a bit – but Jesus doesn’t stop there

When we get to the end of **verse 26** we see Jesus say that the person who doesn’t hate “*even his own life*” cannot be his disciple

Again, this seems shocking especially when we consider passages such as **Ephesians 5:29** that tells us –

*“...no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church”*

And that verse comes after telling husbands to love their wives as they love themselves because the Lord knows the depth and power of self-love and how most people would do anything at all to accommodate themselves

**But again, the love we have for ourselves should appear as hatred when compared to our love for Jesus**

And this will show when we are tempted to give in to some pleasure that we know would gratify our flesh but would cause us to disobey or dishonor or displace our Lord

And in resisting those impulses and temptations the true disciple will demonstrate that the depth and breadth of his love for Jesus outstrips even the ingrained love he has for himself

But we also see that this truth goes much further than pleasing ourselves in **verse 27** where Jesus says –

*“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”*

Regretfully, we have significantly devalued the idea of bearing a cross to mean enduring something unpleasant when we say things like, “Well, I guess that’s my cross to bear” to indicate something that brings us some amount of discomfort

But Jesus’ original audience would have understood exactly what he meant

Because in their day a cross wasn’t an inconvenience or an irritation – it was an instrument of slow, painful death

In those days the Roman soldiers would make the condemned carry their cross – or at least the crossbeam of it which itself likely weighed somewhere around 100 pounds – to the place of execution

**But the thing that we must never lose sight of is that *everyone who carried a cross died on that cross***

So, we really must understand this statement to mean that every true disciple of Jesus Christ must be willing to suffer not only humiliation or ridicule or persecution but even a martyr’s unjust death for his sake should it come to that

We are blessed to live in a time and place where death for our allegiance to Christ is only a very distant possibility but we might well be mocked, derided, and belittled; we might suffer a loss of prestige and standing

But those are things the true disciple commits in advance to endure in order to demonstrate the love he has for his Lord

Back when my youngest daughter was just learning to drive I took her out to practice and at the end she remarked how surprised she was at my calm demeanor during the drive even when she made mistakes

I told her, very tongue in cheek mind you, that I had given myself up for dead when I got into the car with her at the controls so I had been at peace

Now, of course I was just joking with her but that really must be the attitude of a Christ-follower

We must give up control over our lives and even give ourselves up for dead in advance and only then we will have the freedom to follow and serve as we must

### **C. Must give up all possessions**

Then skipping down to **verse 33** we see Jesus really get to meddling when he says –

*“...any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple “*

**Now, Jesus isn’t saying that we have to get rid of all of our possessions and live a life of poverty in order to be a Christian**

In order to better understand what he is saying look with me at **Luke 16:13** where Jesus teaches –

*“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”*

Jesus taught about money and possessions more than he did about heaven and hell because he knew how firmly we can be attached to our stuff

And what he’s saying in **Luke 14:33** is that we have to relinquish the rights of ownership of our stuff – we have to give up ultimate control of it so that it can’t control us

There comes a time in the lives of many people when they realize just how much of their lives they are spending on acquiring and maintaining their stuff and how the things they thought they owned have actually begun to own them

**But do you know who didn’t have to worry much about the stuff they owned? Slaves**

Slaves were property – they themselves were owned and anything they had was therefore also owned

And we read in **1Corinthians 6:19-20** that, as Christians, we are not our own, because we were bought for a price

We are slaves of Jesus Christ and we have to have the attitude that we along with everything we own are now his and give up control of our possessions to him

#### ***A High Price***

In those few verses Jesus lays out just how high the price is for one of his true disciples

In fact, as we’ve just seen, Jesus says being a Christian requires that a person give up everything they have in this world – outsized devotion to family and self, control of one’s life, and control of their possessions – out of devotion for him

Nothing short of that will suffice

**Therefore, being a follower of Jesus is not a relationship that one should enter lightly – it's a commitment that deserves careful consideration**

Then in **verses 28-32** Jesus turns to the parabolic portion of the passage where he describes two deliberations that tell of the kind of assessment that one should make before accepting Christ

## **II. Two Deliberations**

### **A. Consider the Cost of Acceptance**

First in **verses 28-30** he uses the imagery of a man who desires to build a tower to say, "**Consider the cost of acceptance**"

*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.'*

Far too often our methods of evangelism consist of making an emotional appeal while we keep the true terms of discipleship hidden until some later time after the person has accepted Christ

And people can be given false assurance through an "easy-believe-ism" that causes them to believe they can simply add Christ to their life along with all their present worldliness and everything will be okay "For ever and ever; Amen"

We tell people that Jesus loves them and will accept them just the way they are – which is true as far as it goes

And in part we are right to do so because we don't want anyone to think they have to get their life in order before they can be saved – that would be like telling people they have to wash up before they can take a bath

But in the process we can gloss over the fact that because God does indeed love them he has expectations of them

He wants to take control of their hearts, minds, and lives and work a change in them and see them conform to the image of his Son

**Because God is gracious there are people who are truly saved with this approach**

But because they haven't done as Jesus instructs here – they haven't sat down and carefully considered the cost of what they are doing – many of them soon fall away when the realities of life come at them and the terms of their acceptance become known

And like the man who is unable to complete his building project they bring ridicule to themselves and the cause of Christ when they fall

As **Bishop J.C. Ryle [Ryle.jpg]** put it many years ago –

*"It costs something to be a true Christian. Let that never be forgotten. To be a mere, nominal Christian, and go to church, is cheap and easy work. But to hear Christ's voice, and follow Christ, and believe in Christ, and confess Christ, requires much self-denial. It will cost us our sins, and our self-righteousness, and our ease, and our worldliness. All – all must be given up."*

**To be a true follower of Christ is a costly proposition and not everyone is willing or able to pay the price**

So Jesus says in the parable of the tower – "Sit down and carefully consider whether you can afford and are willing to pay the price for following me"

### **Savior AND Lord**

I think I need to take just a moment here to make clear that I don't believe there is any biblical support for a person saying they want to accept Jesus as Savior but not as Lord

While I believe that many and possibly most or all are saved without recognizing the full implications of their decision, I don't believe a person can be saved if they are willfully determining that they don't want to live a life of obedience

We all struggle at times with the demands that Jesus puts forth in this passage and we may live them out very imperfectly but I don't see anywhere in Scripture where a person can willfully deny the Lordship of Christ and be saved

**In other words, discipleship is not optional for anyone who wants to call themselves a Christian** and if a person claims to be a believer and does not feel drawn to live in obedience to Christ they are likely deceiving themselves

And they may well hear those dreaded words from Jesus found in **Matthew 7:23** – *“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”* regardless of how “good” they appeared in this life

## **B. Consider the Cost of Rejection**

The next parable in **verses 31-32** is similar but it approaches the same truth from the opposite angle –

*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*

Here Jesus uses the obvious imagery of a king contemplating a battle and his chances for success in the battle and the need for careful deliberation before marching his troops out to engage the enemy

It seems simple enough but there are a couple of details we need to make sure to recognize so that we see what Jesus means to teach us by this parable

First, I want you to notice that **the king is planning a defensive and not an offensive campaign**

It says his enemy is marching his army of 20,000 men against him – the king is being attacked

Then we see that upon assessing his chances he recognizes that he can't prevail against the superior force that is coming so he sends out a delegation to seek terms of peace

To move this into the spiritual realm we need to ask who is represented by the king being attacked and who is doing the attacking because the whole meaning of the parable depends on those associations

Some want to say that the attacking king is Satan but that really doesn't make sense because then Jesus would be saying that we should try to make peace with the devil

It seems only logical then that the attacking king is God and Jesus is saying that every person needs to not only consider the cost of following Christ **but must also consider the cost of rejecting him and his demands because in the end they will prove to be irresistible**

We've already looked at the costs of being a Christian as Jesus laid them out to the crowd following him but when you stack them up against the cost of not being a Christian – not only in this life but for all eternity – those costs become negligible

Let's consider what we lose by rejecting Christ –

- The forgiveness and love of the Father and the peace that comes from a restored relationship with him
- The saving power, support, and friendship of the Son
- The comforting presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit
- The promises and guidance of the Word
- The joy of serving in Jesus' name
- The assurance that we will see him, be like him, and enjoy him forever in his glorified kingdom

Jesus teaches that careful deliberation is necessary and prudent before deciding to follow him and those deliberations must include both the cost of acceptance and the cost of rejection

But the second parable also implies that delaying one's decision too long has the same result of outright rejection because in this case not deciding is not an option

Then in Jesus issues a **final warning** using the metaphor of salt –

### III. A Final Warning

*“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.”*

I’ve always wondered how can salt become “un-salty” – the idea of it has just always seemed weird to me

But that’s because salt in the Mideast during the first century was not like our salt today

Our common table salt is almost 100% sodium chloride and sea salt is roughly 85% sodium chloride because it contains other kinds of trace minerals – but because of their chemical makeup neither of them can possibly lose their “saltiness”

But the common salt in Jesus’ day was only about 12-18% sodium chloride and it was highly susceptible to deterioration and actually could lose its saltiness and wind up just tasting like sand

And when it did, it became worthless for any useful purpose and was simply thrown away

**So what Jesus is saying here is that it’s possible for a person to become useless to God**

I happen to think that Jesus has in mind a follower of his who doesn’t live as he should

What I believe Jesus is saying is that a Christian who continues to fail to live up to being a true believer could one day be judged by God to be useless and removed from this world

But even if he’s talking about an unbeliever posing as a believer eventually being removed from the midst of the church and not a believer being cast aside; either option is terrible to contemplate

The point is that God has a purpose for each person but to be useful to God one must be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and those who relinquish their usefulness will eventually be thrown away

### Conclusion

In order to attract people, many churches have fallen into a kind of soft, feel-good Christianity that makes no demands

Historian **Thomas C. Reeves** [Reeves.jpg] put it this way in his book titled, The Empty Church:

*Christianity in modern America...tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, a zeal for souls, a fear as well as love of God. There is little guilt and no punishment, and the payoff in heaven is virtually certain. What we have now might be labeled “Consumer Christianity.” The cost is low and customer satisfaction seems guaranteed.*

Is it any wonder then that people approach their faith as they would a buffet; selecting only the things they want and rejecting the rest?

**As a result, Christianity has been significantly devalued and cheapened because something that costs us nothing soon becomes worth nothing**

So, let me ask you, what have you given up to be a Christian?

Is being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ costing you anything at all?

Jesus said that anyone who doesn’t put him above their family cannot be his disciple and yet we know how often we elevate family events and supposed obligations above being present with God’s people

We also know how prone we are to cater to our own desires rather than sacrifice the least bit even though Jesus said we must put him above serving ourselves

We know how attached we get to our possessions and our pursuits and how we will do most anything to preserve our autonomy in partaking of them for our own enjoyment

Jesus didn’t say that we would necessarily lose our families or our lives or the use and enjoyment of our things by becoming faithful followers of him even though those extremes are possible and we must be willing to lose them

**But when so many of us aren’t even willing to be inconvenienced or willing to schedule our lives differently or willing to give up even the most trivial of comforts to allow us to fully follow Christ we have to seriously question why**

Honestly, I think it's because we've either lost sight of the truths Jesus teaches in this passage or because we never understood them in the first place

And, if it's because we've never properly seen these truths, that should tell us that we need to be more diligent in letting people know what will be expected of them as Christ-followers

Sadly, I would be willing to bet that most people who have had the gospel presented to them have had the demands that Jesus places on their lives gone unstated – or at best, understated –

So that they come away with the idea that being saved simply involves believing and trusting some facts rather than yielding their life to Christ

As a result, many people have casually accepted what was presented to them and become casual followers of Christ

### **And Christianity that costs nothing is worth nothing**

It does nothing to further the kingdom, it does nothing to defeat the enemy, and it is easy to walk away from

But it doesn't have to remain that way

Just as we saw last week when we considered the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, we can't do anything about what we have done or not done in the past but we can be diligent and faithful from this time forward with as much time as we have left

We can determine for ourselves to put our allegiance to Jesus above all other things and hand over ownership of everything we have – including ourselves – over to him

We can also determine to be faithful in telling others just what is involved in being a Christ-follower and do our best to make sure they understand what they are agreeing to –

### **That truly accepting Christ means accepting him as Lord as well as Savior**

Jesus himself wanted his followers to understand exactly the bargain they were entering into and we should want to do no less when we present the gospel

Because, while we must let people know that accepting what Jesus offers means they must give up control and may well cost them everything they have in this life, we are also able to show them that rejecting his offer will definitely cost them everything they might have in the next

But we can also show them **Matthew 11:30** where Jesus promises that the demands he places on his followers will prove easy to bear because he also gives us the power to bear them

And when people understand that being a Christian actually means something and then decide to follow Christ, we will find that those calling themselves Christians will actually be faithful followers of Jesus Christ who are excelling for the kingdom

Let's pray