

Casual or Committed Christianity

Luke 14:25-35

A hog and hen were in the barnyard discussing the church's program to feed the hungry and what they might do to contribute toward the endeavor. They considered a number of suggestions including one offered by the hen. She thought it might be nice to provide a ham and egg breakfast. The hog pondered that for a moment and then objected to the idea. He stated the simple facts that for the hen it was only a contribution, but for him it was total commitment.

That, my friends, is the cost of discipleship and the topic Jesus addressed in the text we will consider this morning. Please turn in your Bible to Luke 14:25-35 where we will address the cost of discipleship. We find from this passage that discipleship has a call, discipleship has a cost, and discipleship has a challenge. It is a decision we all face and must make.

In this passage Jesus helps us to understand what is really involved in discipleship. He lets us know exactly what is required.

On vacation we have from time to time gone on hikes around lakes and in forests. The maps giving directions for each of the trails are specific about the level of the route from beginner to experienced. Let me share some actual comments provided on response cards at one wilderness area.

"Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid trails that go uphill."

"There are too many bugs, leeches, spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the areas of these pests."

"Please pave the trails... Chair lifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them."

"Escalators would help on steep uphill sections."

"A McDonald's would be nice at the trailhead."

"There are too many rocks in the mountain."

I don't think those folks quite understand the meaning of wilderness. They were looking for something that was convenient and easy. They weren't prepared to "pay" the cost for the experience they were pursuing. Yet that is just what people think about discipleship. Some believe that discipleship should be easy, even automatic. One pastor goes so far as to suggest that if you are a Christian then you are a disciple. He says they are synonymous terms. There is some truth to that. When we become a Christian we become a learner of Christ, but there are those who choose to remain in an infant or child state of their faith and don't go beyond that because it is more demanding because more is required. They want discipleship to be easy, even instant something you don't have to work for.

When Russian comedian Yakov Smirnoff moved to America he was amazed at all the instant products you could buy in the store.

You buy powdered milk, add water and you get milk. You buy powdered potatoes, add water and you get mashed potatoes.

Then he found baby powder, add water and you should get a baby.

We want things instantly, even in the Christian life when it comes to discipleship, but Jesus says there is more to it. What Christ suggests indicates that there is more to discipleship than just a profession of faith, or going to church, or reading your Bible, even praying. Those are part but not the heart of discipleship.

Robert Coleman, in his forward to the book *Discipleship* writes "Something is missing in the life of the church. Today's institution has a polite form of religion, but it seems to lack power, the power to radically change the wayward course of society. This is not to say that nothing worthwhile is happening. In fact, all kinds of things are going on, and if success is measured by big meetings, big buildings, and big budgets, then the church appears to be doing quite well.

But the real question has to be asked: is all this business actually fulfilling the mandate of Christ to make disciples and teaching them, in turn, to do the same? That's the mission of the church...it is becoming painfully evident that getting more people on the rolls has not resulted in a corresponding increase in transformed lives.”

There are a lot of books on the market today tackling the idea of discipleship, what a disciple should look like and how to get the disciple to that point in his or her walk with Christ. But there is no book so powerful in helping us understand what is involved in discipleship as the Bible and Jesus addresses that for us in a very succinct way. Let's first consider the call of discipleship.

I. THE CALL OF DISCIPLESHIP – v. 25-27

Throughout the Gospels we see time and time again that wherever Jesus traveled crowds also accompanied Him. The cross and His crucifixion are fast approaching and Jesus' words begin to take on a sharper, more urgent tone. He continues to proclaim the Kingdom of God. His miracles affirm that He is the promised Messiah. He is calling people to follow Him instead of the manmade traditions the religious leaders have made Judaism to be. Following rituals will not bring eternal life, only faith in Him as the true Messiah and Savior.

It is my opinion that contentment in the Christian life is the breeding ground for carnality. When we choose to remain where we are in our walk with Christ then we dramatically lessen our impact in the world around us. We lose our flavor and as we will see, become useless. A pastor friend of mine has said that if we don't love Christ more today than we did yesterday, we have backslidden in our faith. Jesus turned to this crowd following Him and issued a call. We read it in these verses. (Read vs. 26-27)

Why did the crowds follow Him?

They followed Him because He was a different kind of teacher than all the other religious leaders. He spoke with authority.

They followed Him because His demeanor and character were different than the religious leaders. He was gentle, compassionate, kind, and loving. They followed Him because of the miracles He performed. No matter what the malady, He healed. They were amazed at all He did and said. Yet...
John 6:60, 66-69

But Jesus stopped them in their tracks and issued the call of what being serious about following Him would look like. If we could read between the lines for a moment, He would be saying “You people follow me for very superficial reasons. If you really want to be a disciple then here is what you need to do – hate your family and take up your cross.” What He told them, He tells us today. Consider carefully the motivation for following Christ and what is involved in being a disciple.

There are a lot of people who like being identified with Christ as a Christian, but when it comes to the hard stuff of what a disciple is that's a bit too radical for them. They want perks without the pain.

The word hate that Jesus uses here is a very strong word and it means to detest. It's the same word that is used in how much God hates sin and the same kind of intensity with which we should hate sin. But most of the time we tolerate it, have a strong dislike for it, but don't detest it.

So what does Jesus mean then that if we are to be His disciple that we should hate our father, mother, spouse, and child? Let me just simply say this: He does not mean to actually hate them. That would seem to contradict everything else He said about loving others. It means that in a matter of choice our love for Christ comes first, so much so that such love for Him makes it appear like hatred in other relationships. You choose Christ over relationships every time.

A Pastor friend of ours has shared about trips he has taken to India to work with local churches. During Baptismal services they hold for those newly saved, family members will be up on the bank wailing and throwing dirt in the air moaning over the loss of this person as a family member. They call to their loved one not to choose Christ. The person had to make a choice – Christ or family. By choosing Christ it meant in the eyes of the family that person was now dead to them. That meant they lost every tangible provision that came through inheritance. That meant family ties were severed. That meant the likelihood of losing one's job and source of income. That meant being ostracized by the community.

It was a radical decision, but one that stressed loyalty and devotion to Christ over loyalty to one's family. It must be a conscious, willful decision, one that Jesus will not force you to make, but one He asks you to consider carefully before you decide.

Genesis 12:1, 4

Joshua 24:14-15

Daniel 1:8a

I want to suggest to you today that the greatest barrier to discipleship is one of volition. It has to do with the will. Until we are willing to give up our will to totally, wholeheartedly, unequivocally follow Christ in complete surrender to Him and His will for our lives, we cannot be a disciple. Until we come to the place where our love and desire for Christ makes everything else pale in comparison, we have not made a willful decision to be a disciple. Can we be a Christian and not be a disciple? In my opinion there is a difference between being saved and being a disciple. To put it simply it is to put God first in everything. To surrender my will, my ways, my wants for God's will, God's way, and God's want for me.

I think it was Richard Wurmbrand in his book *Tortured for Christ* who tells the story of being in prison. Those torturing him put him in a room and conducted mental and emotional torture. In another

room he could hear the cries of a boy being beaten and they told him it was his son and if he gave up his faith the beatings would stop.

Now I love my son and I couldn't bear the thought of someone beating him on account of my faith, but Jesus is saying that a true disciple will love Jesus more in spite of strong family relationships.

So when Jesus uses the word hate, His audience knows that it is a Semitic word expressing preference. In this case it is to prefer Christ over family.

Jesus continues by identifying another characteristic of a true disciple. He or she must be willing to carry their cross.

Everyone following Him knew what a cross meant and what would happen to the person carrying it. It was a one way ticket to his execution. It was a silent conviction to those observing that Rome was right and the bearer was wrong in regard to the sentence that was about to be carried out. He bore his cross as a testimony that he was about to die. There was no stay of execution, no appeal, no turning back, no escape.

Jesus was not saying that everyone who wanted to be a disciple would have to die physically. The implication was clear. To be a disciple you had to die to your own will and desires. Luke 9:23 reminds us again that this is both a conscious and daily decision. In the same way that a criminal carried his cross as a public display of his impending death, so a disciple bearing his cross must be a public display of the decision to follow Christ.

Warren Wiersbe makes a distinction between the cross we come to for salvation and the cross the disciple carries. "Salvation means coming to the cross and trusting Christ, while discipleship means carrying the cross and following Christ. To carry

the cross means to identify with Christ in His shame, suffering, and surrender to God's will, to die to self, die to plans, and willingly serve Him."

Dwight Pentecost sums it up with these thought-provoking words as we consider the call to follow Christ. "Until I can recognize that everything I have belongs to Jesus Christ, I am not a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has the right to be the one object of my affection; and until Jesus Christ is paramount and preeminent in my affection, I am not a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has the right to fill my mind with the knowledge and the truth of Himself, and as long as I let my intellect rule and trust it, I am not a disciple of Jesus Christ. As long as Christ can reveal His will to me and I choose to debate and to decide whether or not I will do it, I am not a disciple of Jesus Christ...A true disciple is one who has a love for the person of Christ, confidence in the Word of Christ, and is completely committed to Christ, in service and obedience... We become disciples when we, convinced by the Word of God, commit ourselves totally and completely to Jesus Christ to become His disciples."

Matthew 11:28-30

In order to train a younger ox how to pull a plow, it was teamed up with an older, stronger, experienced ox. The experienced ox did all the work and the younger ox learned. The young ox must give up its will to learn from the older, stronger one.

In the same respect, a disciple then is yoked to Christ who invites us to come alongside Him to learn from Him.

In his classic work *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes "The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death – we give over our lives to death. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of

our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."

Growing up at Camp I enjoyed going out to the ice rink in the winter to go skating. When I joined the varsity basketball team our coach made it clear that we were not to ice skate in order to keep from rolling an ankle. There were things I had to give up if I wanted to be on the team.

When I ran cross country and track it meant giving up Saturdays in the fall and spring in order to travel to away meets that took up most of the day.

When Christ calls to follow Him, we must die to self.

Matthew 4:18-22

The Lord is calling out to each of us not to be content with just being saved, but of being a true disciple. Will you consider the call? If so, you must also know the cost of discipleship.

II. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP – v. 28-33

To illustrate the call to be His disciple, Jesus uses two examples to illustrate the cost they must consider.

The first is about a tower. Now we aren't told what kind of tower, just that it is a tower. He could have used anything really. It could be buying a car or a piece of property. It could be taking a vacation. Your tower can be anything.

This guy wanted to build a tower. Jesus says that even before he began to build it, he sat down and considered how much it would cost. He continues by noting that if the man went ahead and began to build without considering the cost then everyone around would mock and ridicule him because he was unable to finish his project. To "sit down" implies that it is a deliberate act, one that will take into account all factors that would be required. He

must be sure he can pay the cost of the project.

Jesus didn't want a blind, hasty, emotional decision without first assessing the cost that such a decision would require. In this illustration Jesus is saying that discipleship takes planning. When we make a willful decision to be Christ's disciple we must be sure we are willing to pay the cost. We must be willing to give up everything for Him.

Lot's wife was unwilling to leave behind her attachment to the world.

Early in his missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, Mark had not counted the cost and left. Demas having loved this present world had not counted the cost.

Abraham did, as did Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, the 11 disciples, Stephen, Paul and through the ages countless others.

Will you today count the cost?

Discipleship means not being content with where you are at in your journey with Christ. It isn't content with the routine. It wants more of Christ, more of His Word, more of His character.

Discipleship counts the cost and is willing to pay the price. That cost will be different for each person. What it costs me will be different than what it costs you, but at the end of the day it's all about giving up our will, wants, and ways for Christ.

David Livingstone wrote in His journal "I am determined not to look upon anything that I possess except as in relation to the Kingdom of God."

There will never be any real, lasting joy if we count the cost and determine that it is too high a price to pay.

Jesus gave a second illustration about a king who learned that another king was coming to attack him. This wise king quickly sat down to determine if his troops half the size of his opponent were a match for the other army. If not, he would send out a

delegation to negotiate terms of peace.

This illustration shows us that discipleship takes sacrifice. Discipleship requires a deliberate evaluation. Again, discipleship is not a question of salvation; it is a question of devotion. The decision is ours alone. We cannot be a disciple of Christ and remain half-hearted or uncommitted. And remember that it is a daily endeavor.

John R. W. Stott writes "The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers – the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. Thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called 'nominal Christianity.' In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism."

Philippians 2:13-14

Hebrews 12:1-3

I come back to what I said earlier that discipleship involves a fundamental transformation of the will. This transformation comes through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer who is willing to wholeheartedly yield to that divine enabler and to obey whatever the Lord commands.

Being a disciple of Christ means that we choose not to remain as spiritual infants, but that we hunger to know God more through His Word, we desire to be more like Christ in character, we sacrificially reach

out to serve others, and we intentionally share Christ with the lost. There is a cost to being a disciple of Christ. That is the challenge.

The challenge for discipleship comes in the closing verses.

III. THE CHALLENGE OF DISCIPLESHIP – v. 34-35

On another occasion Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth. Here He says that if salt has lost its saltiness it is only good to be thrown out. Elsewhere it says that it's only good to be trampled on the ground.

From what I read about salt, salt that is 100% pure will not lose its saltiness, but impure salt will. Salt that came out of the Dead Sea was not 100% pure. It was mixed with gypsum. They had to go through a process of extracting the salt. I also read that such mixed salt was kept in the Temple so that in the rainy season, the salt which wasn't good for anything else could be spread on the marble steps of the Temple so people wouldn't slip.

I think the point is clear – you cannot be a true disciple if you are mixed with the world. Salt that had lost its saltiness wasn't even good enough for the manure pile. I'm not a soil expert but some level of salt is necessary. The kind of salt Jesus is speaking about was useless. The challenge for the disciple is to remain salt, to stay useful.

Is it possible then for the Christian to lose his or her saltiness and become useless?

If we are to retain our saltiness as disciples of Christ, we must maintain purity and be a preservative. Through our godly example we must create a thirst in others, both for the infant Christian so that they desire to become a committed disciple and the non-Christian that following Christ as a disciple is the way to go, that it's worth giving up

what we cannot keep to gain what we cannot lose. In John 8:31 Jesus told the Jews who believed in Him that “If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples.”

The word “hold” is the same word in John 15:4 which says we are to abide in Him. Implied in both verses is the idea of continuing in the Word and suggests that there is more to it than just an intellectual understanding of God's Word. Imbedded in the word is the idea of obedience, that we act on what we hear. When Jews heard the word ‘disciple’ they knew it meant a willingness to learn from the teacher and then to go out and do it, to obey it. Many of those following Jesus that day had a willingness to hear Him, but were unwilling to go out and do it. A disciple of Jesus Christ will move from the curious to the convinced to the committed.

- A disciple passionately desires God.
- A disciple openly identifies with Christ.
- A disciple diligently studies God's Word.
- A disciple willingly obeys God's commands.
- A disciple imitates Christ's character.
- A disciple has a purposeful prayer time.
- A disciple lives a humble life.
- A disciple evangelizes the lost.
- A disciple sacrificially serves others.

If you were asked today if you are a disciple of Christ how would you respond? Given what Jesus says He is clear about the cost. If we aren't willing to give up everything, we cannot be His disciple. He is not discouraging discipleship, but He does warn against being half-hearted. We must be willing to pay the price and make sacrifices. Without any commitment on our part, discipleship can't happen.

Churches are full of converts. Jesus is calling each of us to be committed. Discipleship will cost you something. Are you willing to pay the price?