

The title of this morning's sermon is, "What Does It Mean to Love Christ?"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at chapter 14, verse 26.

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word. Let's back up to verse 25 for context...

**Luke 14:25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 "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. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**

You may be seated. Let's pray.

I think this passage contains the clearest teaching on discipleship in all of Scripture.

In our last sermon in Luke's gospel, we talked about how Jesus seemed to DISCOURAGE people from following Him. We looked at a few accounts of Him saying things that caused massive numbers of people to turn back.

And this account is similar. Notice it says **great crowds**. I can't say how many people this was, but I'm guessing if Jesus could miraculously feed tens of thousands of people, which happened on at least two occasions, we are talking about at least thousands of people following him here.

Picture what this looked like, and let me ask you...

What would you expect many popular religious leaders to think at this moment?

- *Wow, this is great. Look at all the people following me. I better make sure I don't mess this up and say something they don't want to hear.*
- *What wonderful, encouraging thing can I say that will cause them to want to continue following me, and hopefully tell their friends so they start following me as well.*

But Jesus's desire was never to build the largest possible crowd. Instead, he wanted to make true disciples; therefore, he never adapted His message to please people. He wasn't running a popularity contest. He always spoke very plainly about the high cost of discipleship, and the cost never sounded higher than it does in these verses. He makes several bold demands that would make any halfhearted individuals turn away.

Look at **verse 26**...

**Luke 14:26 "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.**

And this brings us to Lesson One...

**Lesson One: We must love Jesus more than anyone else.**

This instruction was especially appropriate in Jesus's day, because choosing to follow Him could mean rejection by family, persecution, or even death. People who feared these things would quickly turn away after hearing this statement.

What can this look like in our lives?

You get saved, tell your family, and if they aren't Christians, how do they respond?

They might respond as though you hate them because you love Jesus more than them. They act like you've turned your back on them.

If we are going to follow Jesus, we can't even let our family turn us away from Him.

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Let's talk about what exactly Jesus meant when he said this...

We know he didn't literally mean to **hate** our parents, spouse, children, and siblings, because that would contradict other verses..

**1 Timothy 5:8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

If we're told to care for our family members, how could Jesus tell us to hate them and mean that literally?

**Matthew 5:44 Love your enemies.**

If Jesus tells us to love our enemies, He isn't going to tell us to hate our family members and actually mean it.

So how do we explain this?

He's not referring to a literal, emotional hatred. If you write in your Bible, you can circle the word **hate** and write, "*Love less.*"

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Listen to the way it's worded in the parallel account in Matthew's gospel...

**Matthew 10:37 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.**

And this reveals the idea behind hating our family members: we love Jesus more than them.

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In Scripture, the word hate doesn't always mean hate. Sometimes it is used to create a contrast, or to elevate one thing above another.

It's not even that whatever is loved less is devalued or demoted. Instead, whatever is loved more is esteemed or given greater value.

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I have told you before that we want to let Scripture interpret Scripture, and this is what we see elsewhere in Scripture...

**Deuteronomy 21:15a "If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other HATED,**

This doesn't literally mean that the man loves one wife and hates the other.

If a man had two wives, he would not be able to love them equally. Inevitably he would love one more than the other and the one he loves less is said to be hated...

**Deuteronomy 21:15b and both the loved and THE UNLOVED** (we would expect it to say the one loved and the one hated, but it says unloved because it is synonymous with hated) **have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the HATED** (referring to the one who's unloved), **16 then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to**

**the son of the HATED (or unloved), who is the firstborn, 17 but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the HATED (or unloved), by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his.**

These verses command a man to treat his wives equally, even though he doesn't feel equally toward them.

Here's an actual example in the Old Testament...

**Genesis 29:30 Jacob...LOVED RACHEL MORE THAN LEAH, and served Laban for another seven years. 31 When the Lord saw that LEAH WAS HATED, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.**

Jacob didn't really hate Leah. He just loved her less.

Briefly turn to the right to **Luke 16:13**...

**Luke 16:13 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."**

This doesn't mean we will love one master and hate the other. Instead, it means we can't love two masters equally. We will end up loving one more, and the one that's loved less is said to be hated.

To put all this together...

Just as Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and God loved Jacob more than Esau, we must love Christ more than we love our family members.

What about Jesus saying we must hate our **own life**?

The idea wouldn't be that we would hate ourselves or be suicidal.

Instead, we would put Jesus ahead of ourselves. Not only must we put family members second to Christ, we must put ourselves second to Christ.

What does this look like?

It looks like asking, not what we want for ourselves, but what Christ wants for us. It means instead of pursuing our will for our lives, we pursue Christ's will for our lives.

Now let me ask you a question that you might have been asking...

Why does Jesus use this language? Why does he tell us to hate those closest to us, versus simply telling us to love Him?

Here's what I think is happening...

When we discuss certain things, they are relative and difficult to define without a standard.

For example, if I say, "Raise your hand if this church building is big house is big."

You can't really answer, because it depends what you're comparing the building to:

- You can say yes, this building is big, if you compare it to a pencil.
- You could also say no, this building is not big, if you compare it to a mountain.

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So, if Jesus said, “You must love Me,” we could easily say we love Jesus by comparing him with things we love him more than.

For example, we could say, I know I love Jesus...

- Because I love him more than I love my car.
- Or because I love him more than sports.
- Or because I love him more than chocolate.

Instead, Jesus helps us understand whether we love him by giving us a standard. He says...

*“You must love me so much more than any of the most important people in your life that it looks like you hate them in contrast.”*

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And if we want to know how important it is to love Jesus this much, listen to these verses...

**Matthew 22:35** A lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question to test him. **36** “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” **37** And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **38** This is the great and first commandment.

Loving the Lord is the great and first commandment. This is how important it is.

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But maybe you’re saying...

*“Okay, I’m supposed to love Jesus more than I love anyone else...BUUUT I can’t control my feelings. I can’t make myself love Jesus more. I can’t help it if I FEEL more love for my spouse or children than I do for Christ.”*

It is true that we can’t control the way we feel...BUUT we can control the way we act.

And this brings us to Lesson 2...

### **Lesson Two: Love is actions versus feelings.**

If we are going to understand what it means to love Jesus more than anyone else, we must understand what it means to love, and this means dispelling the common thinking about love from our culture.

Our culture says love is a feeling. When you have strong feelings for people you supposedly love them. When you no longer have strong feelings for people you have supposedly fallen out of love for them.

If people think of love this way – that it is a feeling they have no control over – what can they say?

- *I no longer love my spouse. I wish I did, but I don’t, and I can’t do anything about it, because I can’t control the way I feel.*
- *Even though I’m married, I couldn’t help falling in love with this person at my work. It wasn’t my fault. I didn’t try to make it happen. It just happened.*

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But scripture presents love completely oppositely of this...

- Love is a choice; an act of the will.
- We choose whether we love people or not.

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Think about this verse I mentioned earlier...

**Matthew 5:44** Love your enemies.

If love was a feeling we couldn't love our enemies, because we don't have strong feelings for them...or at least not positive feelings. We might have strong feelings for our enemies, but they're probably negative.

But if we understand that love is actions, which we can control, then we understand how we can love our enemies. We can choose to be kind to them, even if we can't stand them.

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Think about 1 Corinthians, commonly known as the Love Chapter. It is not filled with adjectives, or words describing our feelings. Instead, it is filled with verbs, or action words, because love is our actions toward people...

**1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

How many words describe feelings and emotions?

None!

How many words are verbs or action words describing what love is willing to do?

All of them!

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Think about this verse...

**Romans 9:13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."**

This is a quote of **Malachi 1:2-3**.

It's not that God **hated** Esau. It says that God loved Jacob more than Esau, because he did more for Jacob than he did for Esau:

- He blessed him more than he blessed Esau.
- His actions for Jacob were greater.
- He chose him to be one of the patriarchs and put him in the messianic line.

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I was reflecting that love without actions is much like faith without works, and listen to how James describes that...

**James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?**

Or we could say, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has love but does not have actions?"

**James 2:15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16a and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled,"**

Or we could say, "And one of you says to them, 'I love you very much!'"

**James 2:16b without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

Or we could say, "So also love by itself, if it does not have actions, is dead."<sup>1</sup>

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Now let me connect the dots...

If we must love Jesus more than family members, and love is actions versus feelings, then for Jesus to tell us to love Him more than family members, he is telling us to be willing to do more for Him than our families. We love Jesus more than family if our actions for Him are greater than our actions for our families.

And this brings us to lesson three...

### Lesson Three: Our obedience demonstrates our love for Christ.

There is a question, or even objection, I anticipate you having, so let me be clear about it right now...

I am not saying there are no feelings involved in our relationships with Christ. When we think about what Christ has done for us, I don't know how a true believer can't swell up with strong feelings and emotions.

And Scripture itself describes strong feelings for the Lord. Here's just one well-known example...

**Psalm 42:1 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?**

These verses seem to describe deep feelings, or longings, for God.

So I am not saying that there are no feelings involved in our relationships with Christ.

Instead, I am saying that OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST is SHOWN, not by our feelings, but by our actions, and in particular, our obedience.

Let me share why I think this is so important...

Because we have been influenced by our culture to see love as a feeling, this can make our relationship with Jesus difficult. We can't physically see, hear, or have a relationship with Him, so it is reasonable to wonder how we can love Someone we can't see, hear, or have a physical relationship with.

We can wonder how we demonstrate our love for him, and we do so with our obedience.

And to further emphasize this, look what Jesus says we should be willing to DO for Him in the very next verse...

**Luke 14:27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.**

We will talk about this verse more in the next sermon, but for now it's worth noticing that when Jesus calls us to love Him, he calls us to demonstrate it by being willing to obey him to the point of death.

Go ahead and turn one book to the right to **John 14:15**.

**John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**

We might expect Jesus to say...

- If you love me, you will FEEL this way about Me.
- If you love me, you will think about me all the time.

Instead, Christ said very clearly that if we love him we will obey him.

Look one chapter to the right at **John 15:10**...

**John 15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.**

Again, Christ associated obedience with love, so much so he said that our relationship with him should look like his relationship with his Father...and it will if we obey Him like he obeyed his Father!

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Skip to **verse 13** as we get ready to shift gears...

Notice the verse begins with the words **Greater love has no one than this...**

So we know after he says these words he's going to tell us the greatest demonstration of love.

**John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**

This further shows that love is actions versus feelings. According to this verse there is no greater demonstration of love than being willing to lay down your life for someone else.

This is what Jesus did for us, and it brings us to our last lesson...

**Lesson Four: We love Jesus, because He first loved us with actions.**

Please turn to the end of your Bible to **1 John 4:10**.

Notice the verse begins with the words **In THIS IS LOVE**.

So we know after he says these words he's going to tell us what love is. If love was a feeling, we might expect Jesus to say:

- *Love is that feeling you have that's different than any other feeling you've ever had.*
- *Love is when you can't think of anyone else.*

Instead...

**1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

Again, we see that love is actions: in this case God sending His Son.

This verse defines love for us, and it says that it is what God was willing to do in being willing to give His Son for our sins.

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Think of this familiar verse...

**John 3:16** could say "**For God so loved the world...**

- *He made beautiful trees for us.*
- *He gave us marriage as a gift.*
- *He blesses us with children.*
- *He established the church so we could have wonderful friends and family.*

All these things are true, but the greatest demonstration of God's love is sending His Son...

**John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

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With so much emphasis on us demonstrating our love for Christ by our actions, we could become proud because of all we've done for Him. To prevent this, skip to **verse 19**...

**1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.**

Similarly...

**Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Why do you think you love Christ with your actions?

You love Christ with your actions because he first loved us with his actions.

Christ was that initiator. He began the relationship with us. Then we responded.

- We have only done anything for Christ, because of what he first did for us.
- We have only loved Christ, because He first loved us.

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Let me share a story with you that Rhea gave me permission to share...

One time we were having a conversation and she started asking if I would still love her if she did these different things bad things: "Would you still love me if I..." Each time I told her, "Yes, I'd still love you."

Essentially, she was asking if my love for her was based on her actions: if she acted badly enough would I love her less?

I mention this because it demonstrates THE EXACT OPPOSITE of God's relationships with us...

If his love for us was based on our actions, I hate to think what that would be like.

Instead, God's love for us is based on Christ's actions on our behalf.

God loves us, not because of what we do, but because of what Jesus has done for us.

For that reason, God's love for us can never change, because it is based on the finished and unchanging work of Christ.

**Romans 8: 38 I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in (or because of) Christ Jesus our Lord.**

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Let me conclude with this...

If you're not a Christian then you will face God as a terrifying Judge, who's forced to punish you for your sins because you refused to put your faith in Christ, who would've taken that punishment for you.

But if you are a Christian, you will face God as a loving Father, who could never love you more because His love can never be improved upon, and He could never love you less, because His love is based on what His Son has done for you.

I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I've shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.



Let's pray.

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<sup>i</sup> Another example that support this...

**Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,**

This commands husbands to love our wives just as Christ loved the church, but it says nothing about Christ feelings or the church or a husband's feelings his wife.

Instead, it mentions Christ's actions: giving himself up for the church.

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We don't have to be crucified for our wives, so it goes on to describe what we should do for them...

**Ephesians 5:26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,**

Again, no feelings mentioned. Instead, it is actions. Husbands are to sanctify and cleanse their wives with the word.

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And another example...

**John 21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."**

Basically, if you love me it will be shown in your actions.