

02-03-2019

**SERMON: "What Does It Cost to Be a Christian?"**

**TEXT: Luke 14:25-35**

### **Introduction**

- A. In last week's passage, Luke 14:12-24, Jesus, through a parable, spoke of God's expressed desire to see His celebratory kingdom banquet at the consummation of world history filled with those from every people, tribe and language who have accepted His invitation to follow by faith His Son, Jesus Messiah.

Luke 14:21 ... Then the head of the household ... said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'<sup>22</sup> "And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'<sup>23</sup> **And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.**

- B. In the next scene beginning with verse 25, we see Jesus continuing His journey to Jerusalem, His journey to the cross, with large crowds following Him. So the numbers would seem to indicate that the Father's desire is being fulfilled - these multitudes will be present at Christ's kingdom banquet when He returns in glory to create a new heavens and earth. But as you know, numbers can be deceiving.

Luke 14:25 **Now large crowds were going along with Him;** and He turned and said to them,

- C. If one looks at raw statistics, one might think, "Wow, God must be pleased with the number of people in the United States and in South Carolina who will be filling His house, His church at the end of the age!
1. According to Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study, over 70% of American citizens identify as "Christian," and while the gospel has been corrupted and distorted in many denominations, still over 25% identify as "Evangelical Protestant." Still not bad, right?
  2. The largest evangelical Protestant denomination in this country is the Southern Baptist Convention, with over 15 million members. Of the 5 million citizens of South Carolina, 600,000 are members of Southern Baptist churches - 12% of the state, and that doesn't count the non-member children of their households.
  3. Our sent ones to the darkest countries of the world would rejoice to see such statistics in their countries. So God must be pleased, right? That depends.
- D. Are the church members represented by these statistics for the most part the disciples Jesus commissioned His church to produce? It appears that below the surface of membership

statistics, all is not so well.

1. E.g., those who confess Jesus as Lord are commanded by the Lord not to forsake assembling together.

Hebrews 10:24 Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,<sup>25</sup> **not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

2. While the SBC boasts 15 million members, average weekly worship attendance is only 5.3 million members, non-member children, visitors, attenders, or 35% of the membership number, which means far less than 35% of members attend each week. Yes, some are sick, work at necessary occupations, etc., but I don't think any of us think God providentially hinders 70% of Southern Baptists from gathering to worship His Son each week.
3. Btw, I thank God for those of you who, because you obey Jesus as Lord, make TRB's statistics more encouraging. At the end of 2018 we had 217 members with a weekly worship average of 247, or 113% of our membership number.

E. Question: In a culture that measures success in numbers, dollars, is the church, in order to produce sincere and genuine followers of Jesus, willing to proclaim a gospel that might at times reduce the ranks of potential church members the way fire reduces the material volume of gold ore to produce a purer metal?

F. Jesus Christ did just that. He invites all to come to Him and follow Him as Lord, yet cautions everyone to first count the cost of being His disciple, of being His follower, of being a Christian.

1. Earlier in His ministry at Capernaum Jesus had made such crowd thinning statements.

John 6:57 "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me."<sup>58</sup> "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."<sup>59</sup> These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.<sup>60</sup> Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" ..<sup>66</sup> **As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.**

2. Again at the beginning of this final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus responds to the enthusiasm of a would be follower by cautioning him to consider the cost.

Luke 9:57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "**I will follow You wherever You go.**"<sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, "**The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.**"

G. And now once again Jesus responds to the crowds by issuing them a crowd-thinning condition for becoming one of His followers, for becoming a Christian.

**I. 14:25-27 Jesus's crowd-thinning condition for being His disciple.**

Luke 14:25 **Now large crowds were going along with Him**; and 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**.<sup>27</sup> "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me **cannot be My disciple**.

A. Why does Jesus continue to make such crowd-thinning statements, such crowd-thinning invitations to would be followers? Because Jesus has not come to gather to Himself a crowd but a church, not casual followers but committed covenant keepers, not people who exercise a selective obedience but a people who exercise the obedience of wholehearted faith in Him.

B. The condition: To be a disciple of Jesus requires a faith that receives Him as our crucified (for our sins) Savior, our risen (for our justification) Lord, a faith that not only honors Him above all else, but is willing to risk losing all else in order to gain Him. This begs the question of each of us: What would you and I be willing to give and give up, let go of, in order to gain Jesus?

Philippians 3:8 ... I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom **I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ**,

C. Jesus will not be honored by half-hearted followers, and if He were to receive such followers, the Father would not be honored by His Son. Why?

1. True Christians (little Christ's), those who imitate Jesus, are highly committed to the Son of God, because the Son Whom they imitate is highly committed to the Father.
2. This is why we desire to be a high commitment church - because Christ commissioned us to make disciples of the nations, teaching them to reflect the image of our highly committed Christ.
3. Those who claim for themselves the label Christian, yet withhold from Christ His claim to every part of their lives, misrepresent to the nations who Jesus really is. Claiming to be "little Christs," they falsely represent to the world the Son's love and commitment to the Father as being something less than whole hearted, and therefore, dishonor His name among the nations.

D. By way of instruction and example, Jesus gives us three typical costs of being His disciple.

## II. 14:26a Cost #1 - Family

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.**

- A. Hebrew culture often used hyperbole (overstatement) for emphasis (I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!). "Hate" in verse 26, as you might suspect, is one such example of hyperbole, for elsewhere Luke records Jesus's teachings that direct our hearts away from hating others and to honoring our parents.

Luke 6:27 "But I say to you who hear, **love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,**

Luke 18:20 "You know the commandments, ... **HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.**"

1. In a parallel statement Jesus does not use hyperbole.

Matthew 10:37 "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.

2. The key is not to reduce our affections for our family or close relations, but by God's grace, to so enlarge our heart for the Lord that "hate" conveys how much more elevated our love for Jesus must be.

- B. Following Christ then and now sometimes results in being disowned by family (or worse) and rejected by spouse and friends. Following Christ will sometimes require we discipline our children and sometimes cause them dishonor in order to honor the Lord. In the days of the judges in Israel, the high priest Eli was unwilling to dishonor his wicked sons by removing them from their priestly office, so God punished him and his household for honoring them above the Lord.

1 Samuel 2:27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, ...<sup>29</sup> **Why do you ... honor your sons above Me,** by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?' ...<sup>31</sup> 'Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house. ...<sup>34</sup> 'This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: **on the same day both of them will die.**

- C. The most loving thing we can do for our family members and the family members of God's household, the church, is to honor the Lord well above them.

1 Samuel 3:13 "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, **because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did**

not rebuke them.

Proverbs 19:18 **Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death.**

### III. 14:26b,27 Cost #2 - Suffering

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."**<sup>27</sup> **"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."**

A. Suffering continues to be the experience of Christ's disciples as it was for Christ. From martyrdom, imprisonment (as is happening now in China), to loss of possessions, jobs, public slander and ridicule. Popular Irmo High principle Eddie Walker was pressured out of his job for his unwillingness to sanction a Gay/Lesbian club in the school. Vice President Pence was maligned by Lady Gaga in the national media, *"To Mike Pence, who thinks it's acceptable that his wife works at a school that bans LGBTQ, you're wrong. You're the worst representation of what it means to be a Christian."*

B. How can we claim to be following Christ while being unwilling to follow His example of suffering?

James 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore **whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

1 Peter 2:20 ... But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.<sup>21</sup> For **you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,**

### IV. 14:33 Cost #3 - Money/Possessions

Luke 14:33 **"So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."**

A. Followers of Christ relinquish claim to all possessions. We are instead to be "rich toward God."

Luke 12:20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'<sup>21</sup> **"So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."**

B. Contrast the rich young ruler who considered himself obedient to God's commands, versus the repentant tax collector, Zaccheus. One became a follower of Jesus, and one walked away, holding on to his wealth.

Luke 18:21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth."<sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, "**One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.**"<sup>23</sup> But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

Luke 19:8 Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "**Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.**"<sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house,** because he, too, is a son of Abraham.

#### V. 14:28-32 Two illustrations of the need to count the cost.

- A. 14:28-30 the tower builder - must calculate in advance his ability to complete the construction.

Luke 14:28 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and **calculate the cost** to see if he has enough to complete it?"<sup>29</sup> "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him,<sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

- B. 14:31-32 the warring king - must not pick a fight before evaluating if he can provide what is necessary for victory.

Luke 14:31 "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will 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?"<sup>32</sup> "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

#### VI. 14:34, 35 The cost of failing to follow Jesus as Lord.

Luke 14:34 "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.**"

- A. Jesus did not go to the cross, begin to die for us, then lose His resolve and come down from the cross. If He had begun but not finished, He could not have saved us. So also is a faith that begins to follow Jesus, but does not endure to the end - such faith will not save us.
- B. Example: salt that loses its saltiness. (Show Dead Sea slides of salt crystal). While pure sodium chloride cannot cease to be "salt" and therefore, "salty," Dead Sea salt has gypsum and other minerals within it. Moisture can leach out the sodium chloride, leaving a substance that looks like salt, but no longer has its valuable properties. It is only good to be thrown away - a metaphor for eternal condemnation, a warning contained in a

parable earlier in the chapter. Those making excuses to turn down the Lord's invitation, giving priority to earthy possessions and relationships, have no place in God's kingdom.

Luke 14:18 "**But they all alike began to make excuses.** The first one said to him, '**I have bought a piece of land** and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.'<sup>19</sup> "Another one said, '**I have bought five yoke of oxen,** and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.'<sup>20</sup> "Another one said, '**I have married a wife,** and for that reason I cannot come.'<sup>21</sup> "And the slave came *back* and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, ... "Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel *them* to come in, so that my house may be filled."<sup>24</sup> **For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.**"

## Conclusion

- A. By definition, a disciple/follower of Jesus is one who relinquishes claim to all personal rights, relationships, privileges, possessions, even life itself, out of love and loyalty to God's Son -Why? - because to follow is to imitate the Son Who did not regard His equality with the Father a thing to hold on to, but emptied Himself of His divine privileges, and took on the form of a servant, and became obedient to God by giving up Himself for our sins on the cross.

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.<sup>8</sup> Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- B. The Lord, in His Word, offers a salvation through faith in Him that, on the one hand, is a free gift of God's grace that, on the other hand, costs us everything to obtain. And yet it is again His grace that enables us to give up everything else in order to gain Christ.
- C. And that enabling grace of God is provided to us by Christ, who put into effect God's promised New Covenant, where God promises to write His laws on the hearts of His people, enabling us to become covenant keepers like our Lord, who will remember our sins no more, and grant us eternal life.

Hebrews 8:6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as **He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.** ...<sup>10</sup> **FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS.** AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.<sup>11</sup> "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO

THE GREATEST OF THEM. <sup>12</sup> **"FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR  
INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."**