

Mere Christianity

By Jeff Noblit

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Bible Text: Luke 14:25-36

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We're in Luke 14, would you go there this morning? Luke 14, the Lord has finished with his dinner party with the Pharisees and we've seen three distinct lessons there where as has been his pattern, he openly embarrassed and rebuked the Pharisees once again. Those people that say Jesus was always kind and sweet and never putting anyone on the spot or called out anyone, have no idea about the true Jesus of Scripture. Now he's leaving that dinner party, by the way, probably quite an extravagant meal for the day and here's what happens. Verse 25, Luke 14,

“25 Now large crowds,” one translation says multitudes, “were going along with 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 carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 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? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” 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? 32 Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. 34 Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? 35 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.”

Let me give you the title first, that would be good, wouldn't it? “Mere Discipleship.” Mere in the sense of basic standard Christian discipleship. Here's what Jesus says it is. First of all, it requires a devotion and I. We call this a possible devotion. That is, becoming a disciple and being a disciple is possible for anyone, in fact, it's possible for everyone. We see here that the Lord has left this dinner party with the Pharisees and these multitudes are following along. I think a couple of things are happening here: first of all, I

think the multitude is quite pleased that the Pharisees who – I mean, this was just deliberately exalting themselves over everyone else and kept everyone else under the dominion of their harsh legalism so I think the multitudes in general rejoiced over the way he was dressing them down, embarrassing them and rebuking them continually so they were excited that somebody is putting these self-righteous Pharisees in their place but also he's healing, he's raising the dead, he's feeding the hungry, he's teaching marvelous things and so just these great crowds are going along and now Jesus turns to address them. He knows something about people, you see, he's omniscient. He knew their hearts. He knew that while they were thrilled about a lot of things about him and many of them were saying that they were committed to him, he knew they were not. He knew they didn't really understand what it means to be his disciple.

So, knowing their hearts and seeing the future, he addresses it but notice he's addressing everyone. That's why I get the fact that this is a possible devotion. Everyone is addressed here. Now, sometimes Jesus would pull aside his apostles and just speak to them particularly, sometimes to explain his teachings that they might have a better understanding. Sometimes he would address specifically the Jewish religious authorities as was primarily the case in the preceding three messages we saw while he was at the Pharisees' dinner table. Sometimes he would just address an individual or maybe a small number of people talking about a particular situation in their lives. But here we have the instruction going to everyone: a large multitude and he turns to everyone and he gives these statements. I think that tells us something: it means that everyone has the choice to be or not to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. No one is excluded. As you will remember, there was a sect of Gnostics that became very strong and very popular in the first century, second century church and they taught that only a few people had the elite knowledge to really know God and really be a Christian. That's false. Everyone can be a disciple if they choose to do so. The invitation is as wide as grace is boundless. He's addressing all. In John 6:37, the end of that verse says, “the one that comes to me I will certainly not cast out.” What a statement.

We get some wonderful illustrations of this in the Scripture, the woman at the well comes to my mind. Here the woman is a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were half-Jew/half-Gentile and the Jews thought they were worse than being all Gentile so the Samaritans were considered unclean and ungodly, rejects of God, if you will. You didn't go near Samaritans, you didn't hang out with Samaritans and of all things, Jewish men never had any conversation with Samaritan women. So Jesus sees this Samaritan woman as he's passing through Samaria and of all things, first of all, he speaks to her. It was an amazing thing. He actually showed her kindness though he did clearly point out her sins of immorality. He speaks to her, he rebukes her and corrects her showing that she has value and opportunity and he offers her the living water which means he cast salvation out to her also, showing us that in this cultural setting you could have not been in a worse category as far as can these people know God or be saved by God, well, the Samaritans were about as low as you could get and Jesus says yes you can. It's a possible devotion for all.

In the earlier text, we saw back up in verse 13 where Jesus gives the parable of throwing a dinner party and he said, "You ought to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind." While that's literally true, I think the spiritual implication is bigger, that was a category of people that were considered, again, outcasts. If you had an ailment or disease of this nature, they would think that you or your parents sinned in a grievous way to cause God to do this to you and you were unclean before a holy God. But Jesus said, "No, all of those you think are separate and cast out from God and the family of God, they're all welcome in. They all can come in." It's a possible devotion. It is a genuine and real possibility for anyone to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Now, what's the application of this? The application of this is obvious: if you're not one, you must become one, you should become one today. You ought to decide today, some of you young people have not yet committed to Christ. You should decide today, "I want to come to Christ. Today, I dedicate myself to him. I want to honor him in my life. I want to give him my all." You will be held fully responsible before God if you refuse to become his disciple.

Now, there's an application for the true church, the believing church and that is: we must continue to reach out to all and to everyone and at all times. There is just never a person that we can say they're not one we can reach out to. Yes, there may be the rare occasion of not casting your pearls before swine but sometimes that's hard to know but my point is if someone will give us a listening ear, we ought to be willing to tell them something of our salvation and something of the gospel. Everyone is a potential disciple of Jesus Christ.

Now, Jesus says in verse 26 here, "If anyone comes to Me," so he's saying it's possible for all to come but now they're not coming to adopt a set of rules. They're not coming to just adhere to a particular philosophy, they're coming to him, the living Savior. The old simple hymn,

"I Serve A Risen Savior,
He's in the world today.
I know that he is living,
Whatever men may say.

"He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way."

We come to him and anyone can come if they will come, becoming a true disciple is a real possibility. But not only is this a possible devotion, as the Lord continues talking about mere or just the basics of what a disciple is and what discipleship is, secondly, it's a preeminent devotion. This is going to be a heavy-duty lesson for a carnal audience. It's not really that heavy-duty for truly converted people who love Christ but for this audience, the great majority of which are to one degree or another just thrill-seekers or amusement followers being around Jesus, this is going to cut them to the quick. He says to them just pointedly, just throws it out there to this large crowd, "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.”

So, to this growing excited even adoring crowd of followers, Jesus as has been his practice, gives a heavy sermon, a message with cutting severity and when we consider the words that the Lord gives here, one thinks Jesus is trying to repel or diminish disciples, not to attract and grow his disciples. But we've got to remind ourselves that Jesus is clearly looking for quality, not quantity. He's got the quantity. Everywhere he went, countless thousands of people thronged around him, pledged loyalty to him, claimed they worshiped him, said they loved him. He's had the quantity but now he's going to define for them what it really means to connect with him. You see, Jesus wasn't about just fixing their problem and in our day in the evangelical church we need to remind ourselves: Jesus is not just about giving you a ticket to get out of hell and get into heaven though that's wonderful. He's calling people out, that's what the word “church,” ekklesia, means, “called out ones.” He's calling them to leave all that they've known as far as religion and philosophy, even their family if necessary to join with a new group, his developing church. You can't leave the local church and have any of these truths. It's a separating from the world and former religions and allegiances and to whatever degree necessary, we forsake them and unite to this new group so he says, “You're going to have to hate your mother, father, brother, sister, your spouse, even your own life.” What he means there is: you love them far less in comparison to your love for me. It's an idiomatic expression yet it's a very pointed and very serious expression. Christian truth calls all men to love all other men so we've got to remember that. This is not an endorsement of an active hate towards someone, that's not what he's saying at all.

Now, we do know the Bible teaches a righteous indignation or you might say a righteous hatred. That is, it's not sinful and as a matter of fact, it's pleasing to God. It's a righteous indignation or anger that has the pure motives of wanting to glorify God and wanting the good of the person involved. It's why Ephesians 4:26 says, “Be angry and yet do not sin.” There's a righteous anger. I mean, there are individuals and actions that deserve righteous anger, an anger that results out of a love for God and his truth that is being trampled upon but it's unlike sinful anger. Now, sinful anger is self-centered, not God-centered. Sinful anger is about yourself: you want to protect yourself, secure yourself, shield yourself. You're just thinking about self. You want to gain something for self. That's a sinful anger, it's not God-centered. And sinful anger usually acts out of an uncontrolled passion that comes over you. Look, it starts ruling you and you don't relent. But the fruit of the Spirit is self-control so there is a righteous anger that's completely under control and it's used properly to glorify God and be for the good of others.

But here the teaching is, when Jesus says, “Okay, you've got to hate your own family members,” is that while we are not often called to forsake our family and even everything else for Christ, every true disciple has in his heart the desire that he would do so if God's will required. Every true disciple has the germ in his heart that, “Lord, if you'll give me the grace, if honoring you requires it, even my spouse, even my parents, even my children, I would forsake before I forsake you.” That's mere discipleship. This is not an extraordinary discipleship. This isn't just for committed Christians. This is for all

Christians. Acts 21:13, the Apostle Paul says it rather clearly, "Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

So, to be a true disciple means I possess within me something of a genuine love and a devotion to Christ that is preeminent above all other loves and all other devotions in my life. Now, I wouldn't say that that is fully developed in all of us. I wouldn't say that we could say, "You know, I'm ready at any moment," at all the time to do that but when you charge back into your prayer closet, when you draw back near to God, when you repent again of the things that allure you, there is that settled resolution in the true disciples heart, "I want to love my Christ supremely. I want to honor him above all others." You've got to understand something: while it's not often God's will that you have to forsake your own family, for probably the majority of these Jews, that was going to happen. You see, they didn't just go home one day and say, "Oh, I've accepted the Jewish prophet Jesus to forgive me of my sins but I'm still in on everything else the family does." No, no, no, the moment they received Jesus, they were baptized to publicly state for everybody, "I'm through with all of that. I've joined a new collectivity, a new group." That's what was so shocking. They, in a sense, saw it being a traitor to the state of Israel and a denier of the faith of Israel. It's a weighty thing they were doing and losing their families to boot, many of them if not most of them.

You see, to follow Jesus Christ means we love him. You didn't just join up. You didn't just say, "I don't want to go to hell," that's true but that's not the crux of it, that's not the core of it, that's not the heart of the issue, it's that you love him. To be his disciple without the foundation of loving him first is a false discipleship and there are many of those out there. Professing Christendom is full of people who are just in their human ability disciplining themselves to do some certain rules, to keep some certain traditions, to honor some certain standard of morality and while it may make them better citizens and better neighbors, it doesn't make them disciples of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 20:37, the Lord says, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. He who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." It means, I am fully devoted to my wife. I'm fully devoted to my children. I'm fully devoted to my grandchildren, but should the day come when for some reason or some place they said, "I cannot fellowship with you, Dad," or "Granddad," or "husband, because of your devotion to Christ." Then with a broken heart, without question I must be willing to say, "I choose Christ. I hope you would go with me but I choose Christ." That's what Jesus is saying.

In the Islamic religion, Mohammed, their prophet, would gain disciples by feeding the carnal lusts of the followers but Jesus knows nothing of this wicked bait and switch. He entraps no one with projections of a smooth path to heaven. He gives potential disciples the truth. That's what we need in Baptist evangelical pulpits, the truth. So, God will build churches that – listen to me – that not if – listen to your pastor – when the persecution comes, we won't lose but just a few instead of the churches emptying out like they did in Nazi Germany because they were packed full of false professors, because the pulpits did not preach the truth. They came in under a false premise and in our day in modern evangelicalism, wherever these happy church, fun church, exciting church, up church,

relevant church and all the like nonsense, what's going to happen when the world comes against us and demands we pledge allegiance to them instead of Christ? Do you think that happy crowd is going to stay with us? No, they're going to run. They're going to run just like these folks did. The overwhelming majority by the time he gets to the cross, practically 100% said, "No, this is not the kind of Christ, this is not the kind of Messiah we signed up to follow." Until the Spirit came on Pentecost, then the Spirit did something in their hearts they couldn't do themselves. We'll get to that in a moment.

So, Jesus tells potential disciples both of the trials that will come but the great comforts that come from being a disciple. He tells them of the labor involved but the greater reward that's involved. You know, I think you could say that I've labored here as a pastor. I think it would be honest and I just mean this because I think it's true, that for many years I've done at least the work of two men. I'm not saying that was wise or good but that's the way I worked here, but I can tell you the reward of fellowshiping with you guys in this body is wonderful beyond compare. There is labor but there is reward. He tells also about his running a race. That's difficult, friend, but he also says there's a prize. He says there's a battle and a fight. Paul ended his ministry saying, "I have fought the good fight." But he also says there was a victory. By the way, the victory is assured.

As his disciples, we may, indeed we will, at times, have to stand against other folks. We have to stand against their opinions and their inclinations. We have to reject their counsels and their advise. We may have to even renounce an entire culture and sometimes that may include our immediate family. Scores of these folks listening to Jesus on this day would do that very thing. But even if it breaks up families, we become a disciple of Jesus Christ and we remain true to him all the way to the end. In fact, the point is: this ought to be a settled resolution in your heart. You may not be called upon to do any of this today, next week, next year or even all the way to your death bed but it should be settled: I love him preeminently; my devotion to him is beyond and above everything else. Period.

Revelation 12:11 talks about those martyrs in the end times and we might be some of these very folks, who knows, "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony and they did not love," did not love, "their life even when faced with death." That doesn't mean they absolutely didn't love their lives, it means compared to their devotion to Christ, they didn't consider their life of any value. Loving Christ supremely is not only consistent with hating, this type of hate he's talking about here where you love him so supremely by comparison you would hate even your family, loving Christ supremely is not only consistent with that type of hate but this type of hate is absolutely necessary to this type of love. You see, you can't love him rightly if in comparison you don't hate everyone else. It doesn't mean you actively hate anyone, okay? It's the principle. You're not loving Christ genuinely and you're not a true disciple of his if you do not hate all others and all of the things in comparison.

Verse 27. He says another thing here, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Carrying a cross. Of course, cross was a type of punishment, a type of execution in this day rendered by the Roman Empire. Let's begin

by looking at what is not carrying a cross. You don't carry Jesus' cross, I know a few gospel songs say that and I think I know what they mean but he's the only one that could carry his cross and he carried it beautifully and perfectly and wrought our redemption, Amen? That cross is done but we carry our cross, he says. That's why there's two of them over the baptistry: there is the Lord's, the center prominent cross, he did that; the second cross hangs onto the first one. Amen? That's ours. That's the saints' cross. But what is the opposite of carrying your cross? The opposite is following after the world. The opposite is going with the flow. The opposite "changing with the times." The opposite is, "Well, let's avoid controversy." The opposite is, "Well, we've got to stay relevant." Carrying your cross means going against the flow of the world, standing against the changing times when it violates eternal truth. It's welcoming controversy, persecution or rejection if following Christ produces such. Now, Satan and false teachers, they always show you the best and hide the worst if you become their disciples but Jesus, the true prophet, honestly exposes the hardships upfront.

In Rome, the cross, being crucified hanging on a tree until death, was the greatest public shame and humiliation. When you were a convicted criminal in Rome and you had to carry your cross down the streets of the city, it was meant so that you would be making by that very action, a public declaration that says, "I am wrong. I am guilty. I am condemned. I deserve this and Rome and its justice is right." Did you get that? That's what it meant in Rome when that convict carried that cross. "I'm wrong. I'm a law-breaker. I'm guilty and Rome is right." That's what we do when we carry our cross, we are publicly declaring that we're wrong, that we're sinners and the world is wrong and the world is unrighteous and we are striving by the strength that he gives us to walk with him in a world that's flowing against him so the ridicules and the scandals and the rejections and the persecutions and the lies and the twisting to put us in a bad light that we experience from people at school or in the office or in the neighborhood or wherever it may be, that's us saying, "Let it come! I'm not changing! God's right and the rest is wrong! I'll take it. I'm wrong, the world is wrong and God is right." That's what Jesus is saying when he said, "Take up your cross and carry it."

What criminals in Rome were forced to do under duress, disciples of Jesus Christ do voluntarily. You don't have to carry a cross, you don't have to be his disciple, it's a choice. He looks to this great multitude of folks and by the way, as far as the world is concerned, had almost nothing, they were very, very poor, and tells them, "You've got to give up whatever else you've got left if you're going to be my disciple." He said, "You're going to have to carry your cross, verse 27 and say, "come after Jesus," that means following him and him being Lord of your life. Friend, these conditions are absolute. Now, you may be some man's disciple without these conditions but you cannot be Christ's disciple without these conditions: to love Christ and to gladly embrace his principles is what Christianity is about. Now, listen, let's be balanced: we never seek afflictions, we never seek trials, we do not see poverty, of course not. Some foolish imposters go around seeking even creating suffering and affliction that they might show that they're spiritual. What foolish sinful idolatry that is. Remind yourself that Jesus just left one of the most lavish meals in the town and I assume he enjoyed the meal but he didn't compromise his Father's will doing it. But when it was time for him to lay down on

a tree and be crucified, he willingly and joyously did that also. You see, carrying your cross doesn't mean you artificially put on suffering, asceticism is not what Christianity is about. We never seek trouble but we embrace it if God's will and God's call on our life requires it.

One thing is for certain: while heaven is not gained by our afflictions, there will be no crown-wearers who are not cross-bearers. Now, I know the guys on tv and far, far, far, too many pulpits who claim to be Bible preachers have devised a Christianity and a church membership that's almost – it is meaningless and costless. They're doing you a grave disservice. That's like somebody going to sign up to play football for the University of Alabama Crimson Tide and the coach saying, “You'll never break a sweat here, son.” They just did that boy a grave injustice. That's a hard, hard and difficult thing to do. That's what the Lord is saying, “I'm telling you the truth.”

Now, when you think of Jesus, think about what he's saying here. He didn't say, “Throw me into the major devotions of your life.” By the way, if you view Christianity as one piece of the pie of your life: you've got your social life, your business life, your family life and then your Christianity, you don't know Christ. It's not a pie chart. He's the whole pie. As a matter of fact, he's the whole kitchen. He's the whole house. He's the whole world. He's the whole universe. That's Christianity. So, when he says here, though, just if you casually came upon this and saying, “This guy from Nazareth is walking the streets telling everyone that they ought to be so preeminently devoted to him that in comparison, they hate even their spouse and their children. What is he, some kind of arrogant, brash, harsh person? Is he some sort of cruel hater of mankind? Or maybe he's a lunatic or a madman just out of his mind talking this stuff, asking for this preeminent devotion. Who is he?” He's God. He's King of kings and he's Lord of lords. Now, listen to your pastor: if he gave us any standard less than preeminent devotion, it would be a gross inequitable standard. Did you hear that? Because of who he is. Not only a gross inequitable standard, it would be a violation of justice if he asked for any less than preeminent devotion. If he's God, and he is, then the devotion to him must be beyond measure. By his nature, he's infinite. He's infinite in wisdom. He's infinite in power. He's infinite in beauty. And his attributes orchestrate the perfection of holiness.

So, this true God must have and must only have absolute preeminent devotion. There isn't like, “I hope you can get it this high,” on the chart, no, it's all the way off the chart or not at all. That's the way he puts it out there, be done with this thing. “Well, he's a sold-out Christian.” No, no, no, there's only Christians. “Well, he's radical. We're radical Christians.” No, you're silly. You're either biblical or unbiblical. You're either Christian or acting like a non-Christian. “It's a missional movement. We're missional.” What do you mean? You're either biblical or just quit putting these categories that the Bible don't endorse. You're either biblical or you're not. From your heart, he either has your preeminent devotion or he does not. Period, that's the only two categories Christ gives us and I'm not serving you faithfully as a pastor if I give you anything different. So, we are sinning if we offer him less than this – now listen – he would be sinning if he required less because God must have the preeminent devotion.

III. It's a predetermined devotion. Not only is it possible, he says it to all men, not only is it a preeminent devotion but it's a predetermined devotion. Look at verse 28. First of all, the foolishness of being a half-Christian. He talks kind of about people who kind of half-way get in on this thing. He says, "Here's what your life is like when you're a half-Christian." First of all, you're foolish. You're foolish if you're half-Christian. Verse 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him." So he says, "You need to calculate the cost. You need to predetermine if this is what you want to be in on." Christ calls for thoughtful, serious, resolute purposing to be his disciple. You know, we have come to know and so treasure him that everything else we hold we hold loosely. We are prepared if he so ordains to give up everything including our families like many of these folks will do. Whether it's families, sins, self-righteousness, all false doctrine, which means they have to leave their old religion, any and everything must be left behind. Listen, true religion brings cost. Always has, always will. Why should it be that our Baptist forefathers were martyred by the tens of the thousands just because they believed the Bible and we get to have everything we want cost nothing and just go to heaven one day? So, "This is a mere reasonable request," Jesus is saying, "stop and predetermine if this is what you're about."

He says, verse 29, the first thing we notice is if he began to build the tower and didn't finish it, he started with the wrong foundation and that's always the truth. People who start out in Christianity and then fall away were never Christians. The faith that fizzles at the finish was faulty at the first. It's always been that way. So he says, "Here this guy is, he couldn't finish and he begins to be ridiculed because he falls away." It's kind of interesting here: the world will persecute you for dedicating your life to Christ and the world will ridicule you if you dedicate your life and then fall away and become a hypocrite. You might as well just stay with Jesus and go to heaven than to fall away and get ridiculed for that. Now, the Scriptures do teach that in time persecutors can be changed to admirers so they may never become Christians themselves. We see that with Joseph in Egypt. We see that with Daniel in Babylon. We see that in Acts 5 as the church is persecuted but God does a work in them and the community begins to hold, the Bible says, the church in high esteem, Acts 5, I think it's 14. So, hang in there if you're carrying a cross and it's difficult. In time, God may give you blessed favor with those who at one time persecuted you.

It's foolish, though, to be a half-Christian, just go half-way with this thing. Secondly, there's a danger of being a half-Christian. Look at verse 31, he gives another illustration here. He says, "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? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace." Here our Lord says, "Here is a king with an army and he's thinking about sending out his ten thousand men but then he realizes, hey, the scouts have already told me the other king has twenty thousand men. I don't think I want to do this." So, what he says is, so he'll go out and he'll

negotiate terms of peace. He'll send a delegation out to negotiate terms of peace. That is, indeed, what we do with God. We go to him, the stronger one, and we plead for terms of peace and he has provided them. We renounce everything else if we can obtain this peace because we know with our measly ten thousand we can't come against his great twenty thousand so we renounce everything else: our own self-confidence, our own abilities, our own strengths and we go to this king and say, "Peace on your terms, what are they?" That's what salvation is.

Look at verse 33, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." For a few that may have literally been the case immediately for them who followed him 2,000 years ago in that setting. He's not telling every one of us to leave the church today and go and sell everything and give it to missions. That's not what he's saying but he is saying we have a renouncing spirit. For example, he said, "This man went out to build a tower and he had to first renounce his finances and in other things he would expend for the tower's sake." The king with the army had to renounce his army and his resources knowing they weren't strong enough for peace sake and the disciple renounces everything, all his possession, community esteem, even family if necessary, to obtain God and know Christ and be devoted to him.

When he says give up all possessions, he means to be given up to God. Is all your stuff given up to God? My friend, God doesn't just own the tithe, he owns the 100%. Is all yours given up to God? I'm not saying you're supposed to do anything different with your stuff than you're right now doing, I'm just saying what God is saying is, "The true disciple has such a devotion to me that all of his possessions are held loosely and they're given over to God whereby he says, Christ to honor you, to serve you, if you call, if persecution comes against my brothers and sisters in my church and if I stand with them it will cost me greatly to stand with them, I will not falter. I will stand. I will remain true no matter what it costs because I don't love these things, I love you." Now, I enjoy these things, that's not wrong. I praise God for the common graces that the wealth, the retirement, the homes, the automobiles, whatever it may be, but I hold it loosely because I don't love them, I love Christ.

The Scriptures teach very clearly that when persecution comes, often the difficult thing is that you are tempted not to associate with true Christians because then you start getting persecuted and it starts costing you something. That's what he means with give it up. In that case, give it up. Aren't you thankful in God's grace he hasn't called American Christians en masse to do that yet? But there are Christian businessmen losing their businesses right now over their Christian principles. Will you stand with them and say, "Everything else I'll give up"? Look, you cannot be devoted to Christ and not devoted to his church. That's impossible. That's the context of what he's saying. You're leaving another group and you're joining with the new group, the called-out ones, the ekklesia, the church and you're devoted to them and stand together. That's why the Scripture says when one member rejoices, we all rejoice with them and when one member suffers, we all suffer with them because we love Christ and his people more than we love things and our own popularity and our own esteem.

Verse 34, "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? 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." Salt is an element that has a purifying and nourishing role in the world and that's the way God's churches out to be. We ought to be a nourishment and a purifier in the world. That's why our country is going to hell like running water down a funnel right now because the churches are not salty. We don't have the purifying, nourishing element we're supposed to have. And the Lord says, "When it gets that way, you're worthless." Here's what the Lord is saying, "Do you not understand the whole world is under my condemnation. The whole world is judged and guilty. The whole world is under my wrath. The only good I see in the world is if my church is salty and is pure enough and genuine enough and real enough that it's bringing a nourishing purifying effect on the culture." He says, "But when my church fails, then there's nothing left. It's just all worthless now." By the way as a side note: when you're a real Christian, don't go out looking for fights or looking to cause trouble, you just be a true Christian and it will find you. But when you're a true Christian like John the Baptist rebuked Herod for his sin of adultery, he was pouring salt in an open wound, the open wound of Herod's sin and it irritated Herod deeply so he cut John's head off. Now, not all of us are called to be street preachers and proclaim to leaders their sins, okay, that's a rare calling but in our own places and in our ways, we're called to be faithful to Christ, to be salt.

Real quickly, the last statement. I'll spend just a moment here. It's a providential devotion. It's a providential devotion. The last part of verse 35, he says, all of these things, these incredible things to this great crowd of folks, then he just simply says, last part of verse 35, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Interesting. He didn't say, "He who has ears, let him hear." He says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." His point is: all of you that have this unique kind of hearing, this unique ear, all of you that have this special kind of ear that's able to grasp, receive, respond to and embrace these truths. Isaiah 1:3 says Israel by and large did not have that kind of ear, "An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand." Now, they had the prophets, they had the Scriptures but they didn't get it. You might say when you think about these demands the Lord gives, this preeminent devotion, this willingness to hold everything loosely, forsake even my family if necessary for Christ, with that being the standard, will anyone be a true disciple? Oh yes. Those to whom the gospel has been heard and the Spirit has regenerated, they from their hearts will say, "I'm weak. I'm trembling. I'm faltering, but count me in. Count me in. That's what I am. That's what I want to be."

Ezekiel 11:17-21, "Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'"" Jump down to verse 19, "And I will give them," who will give them? God will give them, "one heart, and put a new spirit within them." It didn't come with them, God says, "I'm going to put it in them." "And I will take the heart of stone out," the heart that couldn't hear, that couldn't be penetrated. I'm going to get that out, "And I will give them a heart of flesh," a heart that can receive, that's permeable, that's sensitive to me. Here will be the result, here's discipleship, verse 20 "that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people,

and I shall be their God. But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I will bring their conduct down on their heads, declares the Lord GOD.” Jesus said in John 6:37, “Of all that the Father gives me,” of all that the Father gives me, “and the one who comes to me, I will certainly not cast out.”

Practically, you say, “Pastor, in view of these demands, what should I do? I don't live up to this.” No, but does your heart desire it? If you lived up to it, you'd be glorified already. 1. If there's sin in your life, repent of it. If you've made an idol out of some thing, somebody, a bank account, whatever it is. I'm not saying you're supposed to change anything with it right now but your heart must change about it. Your heart must give it up and say, “God, it's yours. If Christian discipleship requires for it to be gone, it's gone.” You've got to get there so if there is sin, repent of it. 2. Just keep doing what you've been doing. Some people hear sermons like that and want out and do something crazy. Don't do anything crazy. I don't see any call. Now, if God tells you to do something, maybe you're supposed to do something very significant and sacrificial at least from an American definition of sacrifice but here's how you'll know if it's really God, are you listening? Here's how you'll know: that when you give up that home or those clothes or that car or that bank account for the Lord's work, you will equally joyous in the brother that wasn't led to give up his. Did you hear that? Equally joyous with the other brother that didn't give up his because you have no Scripture that gives us a carte blanche standard for everybody so if God tells you to do that, Pam and I have given everything we had other than the house we lived in at times and just gave it to the building programs. Nobody else necessarily was supposed to do that. And we've had other times when we didn't do that.

So, do what you've been doing but do it with a heart that is ready to forsake all if sound doctrine and God's call requires it. 3. Trust future grace. You say, “Pastor, I love Christ and there is something in me that says I do love him preeminently, even over my family but I don't know that I could do that.” Well, you haven't been asked to do it yet. I was on a plane leaving Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I don't remember if we were flying to Birmingham or Huntsville, I think Birmingham and we took off in a storm that later when I got in the next airport, the Weather Channel said this was the roughest weather in America at 9:00 this morning. We took off at 9:00. The roughest weather in America was Baton Rouge, Louisiana at 9:00 in the morning when I was flying in it. There wasn't but about 5-6 of us on the plane and I mean, I've never been in anything like it. Literally, if I wasn't strapped in and holding on with both hands, it would have thrown me all over the plane. When we got to the ground eventually, I asked the pilot, I said, “What could happen in something like that?” He said, “Well, it could have sheered the wings off.” I thought, “Wow, this sounds great. That's encouraging.”

But we hit the ground, my heart was beating, I was sweating, I thought I was going to die, thought it was over and I thought about a story I heard about another man who'd been through the same thing and I thought, “Now Lord, I preached to my people that they'll have grace when the trial comes and the persecution comes and then they'll have the strength to do these things. I particularly told him that there's dying grace that when it's your time, God will come and you'll have a peace.” I've been at many death beds where I

saw the dying grace. I said, “But here I am, a pastor, and I was scared to death.” It's as if the Lord said, “Yeah, you didn't die either. You didn't need dying grace because I wasn't going to take you home yet.” Inspect your heart. Is there in your heart a genuine desire that Christ be your preeminent devotion? And then if you struggle with, “I don't know if I can do that,” there's future grace for that. There's future grace for that. It'll be there when you need it and if you need it.

Now look, I charge you on the authority of Scripture and for the honor of Jesus Christ to rededicate your heart to Jesus Christ today. We live in a corrupt, wicked land. It's time for the church to be the church so I'm challenging you as your pastor to make a new resolute settled resolve – now listen, this includes your church family now because that's what Jesus was calling them to do, come out from another group and bind to a new one that you're devoted to for Christ's sake – and make a new preeminent devotion to him.

Let's stand in prayer.