

Forsaking All Others

Luke 14:25-15:3

With Study Questions

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Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*— ²⁹ lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. ³³ So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. ³⁴ “Salt *is* good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? ³⁵ It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, *but* men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! 15:1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” ³ So He spoke this parable to them, saying” (Luke 14:25-15:3):

Preface

I’ve performed hundreds of weddings. I’ve watched couples struggle through difficult marriages. It has been my observation that the most devastating blows to the covenant of marriage are landed by those who, in one way or another, ignore or violate their wedding vows. Among the wedding vows we hear, either explicitly or implied, the commitment to “forsake all others.”

The Scriptures often utilize marriage as a metaphor for Christ’s covenant with His church (Ephesians 5). In that we come to understand the great love the Groom has for His bride; the ultimate commitment in the faithfulness of His life and the sacrifice of His death. When the Apostle

Paul teaches that Jesus **“gave Himself for her (*the church*)”** (Ephesians 5:25 italics mine) the verb he uses is the same one used by Jesus in ordaining His own betrayal (Matthew 26:16). Jesus ordained His own betrayal on behalf of His bride.

We think of the Christian faith this way. Over and above our love for God we rejoice in God’s love for us. Over and above whatever victories we might have we rejoice in the victory of Christ over death and hell; a victory that makes us **“more than conquerors through Him who loved us”** (Romans 8:37). But in the passage before us we see the Groom informing His potential bride of her vows, which include forsaking all others.

It’s important to note that the passage under our consideration this morning is not designed to make ordinary Christians into super Christians. Jesus has had it with people who think they’re super religious. He did not come for the healthy but the sick (Matthew 9:12); at least those willing to admit they were sick (sinful). What we see in this passage are the conditions for salvation. It is not the recipe to be a great bride, but a bride *period*.

Jesus lays down conditions, instructing His listeners that their lack of willingness to do these things disqualifies them from being His disciples – **“he cannot be My disciple”** (Luke 14:26).

Introduction

As an invited guest at **“the house of a ruler of the Pharisees”** (Luke 14:1) Jesus began to teach in parables. He taught against self-exaltation (*The Ambitious Guest*) then taught against desiring reciprocation (*The Ambitious Host*). In the final parable Jesus taught about the exclusion of the elite clergymen from the kingdom of God and the inclusion of the poor the maimed, the lame and the blind (*The Parable of the Great Banquet*). As Jesus left this particular event we read that **“great multitudes went with Him”** (Luke 14:25). His next recorded parable would be *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*.

But before telling that parable Jesus would teach on the cost of discipleship. After teaching on the cost of discipleship and prior to the *Parable of the Lost Sheep* Luke records **“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him”** (Luke 15:1). Jesus’ association with these sinners drew the criticism of the Pharisees (15:2) which led to

the *Parable of the Lost Sheep*. What would cause the sinners to want to follow Jesus? The instruction in the passage before us hardly smacks of easy-believism. It is certainly not the type of message we hear in modern Christian evangelistic crusades.

Just what is it that Jesus requires of His disciples?

Hate

The language used by Jesus is almost shocking. He begins by informing His listeners that if anyone comes to Him **“and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life”** he cannot be His disciple. This language does not seem to square with Jesus teaching that we should actually love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Is Jesus telling His followers to dishonor their fathers and mothers? That would be a difficult conclusion to draw in light of the fact that Jesus had taught **“Honor your father and your mother,”** and, **“Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die”** (Matthew 15:4). It is important to understand how this kind of hate/love language is used in the Scriptures.

So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he 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 (Genesis 29:30, 31).

Jacob loving Rachel more than Leah is presented as Leah being hated. When Jesus taught about the impossibility of having two masters, He concluded that you will **“hate the one and love the other”** (Matthew 16:13). So it would appear that a mere divided allegiance between, what we might call, the two most precious things in one’s life, can be understood as loving the one that is *de facto* your highest conviction and hating the one just beneath it. It should not be hard to conclude that Leah felt that playing second fiddle to Rachel was a source of great pain for her. This second-place love would have felt like hatred.

Nonetheless, the parallel passage eliminates the confusion:

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. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:37-39).

It is the God-given willingness to pour contempt on all pride – to make our love of our own life (*psuche-soul*) appear as hatred when set against the true life that is found in Christ.¹

Bear the Cross

Toward that end Jesus mentions bearing the cross. We often think of bearing the cross as if we have some specific burden to bear – a difficult job or relationship. But in the first century Roman Empire, if you saw a person bearing a cross, they were carrying it toward their own death; what we might call dead man walking.

So in the first two examples Jesus is addressing a divided allegiance and a putting to death of those things – things that are not God and do not fare well when trying to be God. I might add here that the love one has for father, mother, son, daughter, husband and wife will be a far greater love when one's love for God is primary. If my children become my God, I am placing a role and a burden on them that they are not designed to carry.

Count the Cost

Jesus then calls His listeners to count the cost. He mentions the building of a tower and the attending mockery against someone who would seek to build the tower without calculating if he has **“enough to finish it.”**

¹ It would be absurd to insist on a literal interpretation of the phrase, as if no man were a disciple of Christ, till he threw into the sea all that he possessed, divorced his wife, and bade farewell to his children. Such idle dreams led foolish people to adopt a monastic life, as if those who intend to come to Christ must leave off humanity. Yet no man truly forsakes all that he possesses till he is prepared at every instant to leave all, gives himself free and unconstrained to the Lord, and, rising above every hinderance, pursues his calling. Thus the true self-denial which the Lord demands from his followers does not consist so much in outward conduct as in the affections; so that every one must employ the time which is passing over him without allowing the objects which he directs by his hand to hold a place in his heart.¹ John Calvin.

Years ago one of my college professors asked the class how many wee Christians. It was a secular school and a few hands went up (mine included though I was a new convert). He then asked how many of us knew what we were getting ourselves into. It was a fair question. Even then I had come to realize that the Christian faith was much more than praying a simple prayer.

Yet we should not understand these words of Christ in such a way, as I mentioned earlier, as the means by which we become mega-Christians. I don't know that I know a mega-Christian and if I do know one his/her humility would be as such that I wouldn't know he/she was a mega-Christian.

I am not seeking to downplay the courage of great saints throughout history who counted the cost and paid the ultimate price for their faith. But passages like this have been taken in a very harsh manner throughout Christian history – leading Christians into monastic vows, asceticism and even self abuse. But Jesus would immediately be followed by tax collectors and sinners. So these words must jibe with His promise that He would not break a bruised reed or quench the smoldering wick (Matthew 12:20).

I've been helping with a local high school volleyball program that is one of the best in the nation. The head coach met with the players who will be trying out next week in an effort to prepare them to face the reality that many of them simply won't make the team. If they don't have the physical talent, fundamental skills, positive attitude, etc, there is a very good chance they're going to get cut. This passage is not to be understood that way.

How then do we understand the idea of counting the cost of discipleship? The Apostle Paul was the last person on earth who viewed himself as a Christian walking the victorious life. It was in the present tense and toward the end of his ministry that Paul gave himself the moniker "**chief of sinners**" (1 Timothy 1:15). John Newton, in writing *Amazing Grace* utilized Paul's testimony that he was a "**wretched man**" (Romans 7:24).

But Paul did have one seemingly positive thing to say about himself as he pondered the end of his own life.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good

fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:6, 7).

This call is not a matter of mastering the Christian faith (not that we all shouldn't be growing in our maturity in Christ), it is a matter of keeping the Christian faith. What does that look like? That all our lives we repent of our sins and all our lives we look to Christ and His cross for our peace with God. This is a call that any bruised reed can keep. In fact the bruised reeds are the ones who love it most.

Consider

Jesus finally calls His listeners to compare themselves to a king with an army of 10,000 who is about to go into battle with an army of 20,000. The wise king will sit down and consider whether he is able. The word 'consider' means to think over carefully in an attempt to make a decision. The example concludes with the considerate king recognizing he is outgunned and decides to send a delegation to ask the conditions of peace.

Perhaps this, more than the other examples, appealed to the tax gatherers and sinners. Perhaps it was their God-given recognition that they did not have the ethical, moral or spiritual firepower to meet the King of kings. Those who would stay with Christ would come to find that the conditions of peace would be met by the Prince of peace on the cross of Calvary.

Forsaking All Others

It may sound highly demanding of Jesus to convey to great multitude that followed Him:

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:33).

But the beauty of this call is better understood when we come to realize that everybody is a disciple of somebody or something; and most have no idea who they're following or why. Call yourself what you will – atheist, agnostic, theist – all men have a master but not all men have a

savior. When Jesus calls men to “forsake all (literally to say goodbye)” He is calling us to abandon a fruitless enterprise that ends in death and embrace a living Savior who grants us life. He is calling men to know who their Master is, who their Savior is and to ever repent and ever trust.²

I recently viewed an interview with a Roman Catholic priest. Donning a religious collar he was called upon to denounce a certain politician who held a biblical view of marriage. The priest did not even seek to make a biblical argument. He simply mentioned that there are certain “well meaning” religious people who ignore the social sciences. He made no bones about the fact that modern social sciences trump the Scriptures when it comes to social issues. I offer this merely as an example of a person who is seeking to serve two masters but ends up hating the one and loving the other.

A Dunghill, Rubbish

The lessons comes to a close with these words:

**“Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?
35 It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out.
He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Luke 14:34, 35)!”**

Interestingly enough when Jesus teaches that the salt “**has lost its flavor**” the words literally mean that the salt has become foolish. You can’t season salt for it is itself the season. If you need good salt to season bad salt you might as well just throw the bad salt out, which is what Jesus is teaching.

To believe or to promote belief in a master who can neither guide nor save is a quest in folly. The Scriptures teach that six is the number of a man (Revelation 13:18). No matter how many sixes you lay next to each other it will never be seven (the number of completion – Matthew 18:21, 22). To

² When an alien wishes to become a citizen of the United States of America he must renounce allegiance to his native land and take an oath of loyalty to the country of his choice. This does not mean that he cannot continue to think highly of the nation to which he has said Farewell, but it does mean that from now on he must serve “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” Even far more absolute and unconditional must be the loyalty which citizens of the kingdom of God sustain toward their heavenly country and its “Lord of lords and King of kings.” If a person is unwilling to tender that unconditional devotion, then, says Jesus, “he cannot be my disciple.”² William Hendriksen.

trust in anything less than a God in heaven who sent His Son to save sinners is to trust in the wisdom and efforts of men. So who ends up on the dunghill?

The Apostle Paul was the pedigree of religious and moral excellence and he counted it all rubbish, fit for the dunghill. I believe Paul provides us with a great example of one forsaking all – including his own life. He writes:

...though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:4-11).

A person willing to abandon his own righteousness and be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of his own but a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, is a person who has been found by the grace of God. That is the person who has ears to hear.

Questions for Study

1. Is the passage instructing Christians on how to be super Christians? Explain (pages 2, 3).
2. Is Jesus actually telling people to hate other people in this passage? Support your answer (pages 4, 5).
3. When Jesus calls His listeners to count the cost to see if they “enough to finish,” when is He telling them to calculate (pages 5-7)?
4. Why would the example of the outnumbered king appeal to the tax collectors and sinners (page 7)?
5. When Jesus calls the great multitude to forsake all that they have, what is He actually calling them to do (pages 7, 8)?
6. Discuss how people can seek to have two masters or two saviors (page 8).
7. What did the Apostle Paul consider rubbish? What does it mean to be found in a righteousness that is not our own (page 9)?