

Radical

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
(Matthew 5:27–28 ESV)*

*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.
(Luke 6:36 ESV)*

*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:20 ESV)*

Radical Discipleship

September 8th, 2019

Luke 14:25-35

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 14.

I have found every passage in this series to be challenging – which is to be expected in a series called “radical” – but no text has been more challenging for me than the one we have before us today.

My biggest concern regarding our text this morning is that we will be tempted to try and wiggle out of the weightiness of it. Perhaps an illustration would help to capture how I think we ought to hear this text.

Imagine that you were able to transport back in time to the early days of WW2 and you were given the task of enlisting and preparing young recruits. Imagine trying to explain to them the severity of the task and looking out at them as one young recruit is flicking the ear of his neighbour while still another is rolling his eyes at your “exaggerated” claims.

Can you imagine how disheartening that would be? Knowing what we know now, we understand with horrifying clarity what this commitment will entail. But do you think that any of those young men envisioned the beaches at Normandy? As they packed their bags and boarded planes and trains with visions of glory and grandeur, did any of them have the vaguest understanding of the cost they were about to pay?

How could you possibly prepare those youthful, distracted, idealistic recruits for the challenges that would lay before them?

In a sense, I see something very similar in today’s text.

Jesus is about to say something to us that should leave us trembling under the weight of our calling. We’re the young, naïve soldiers, rolling our eyes and flicking each other’s ears but the one who would go on to be

crucified on a Roman cross, is about to explain to us the cost of discipleship. In our flesh, we are going to want to try and soften this. We are going to want to crawl out from under the weight of this.

Let's hear the text today with a spirit of sobriety. Hear now the holy, inspired, living and active word of the Lord:

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. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a 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 out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

³⁴ "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 14:25-35 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In verse 25 we are told that great crowds accompanied Jesus. The same is true in the world today. Great crowds profess the name of Jesus Christ. Great crowds gather together to listen to Jesus' teaching.

But Jesus wasn't looking to assemble a crowd. He came to build his church – a church that will stand against the gates of hell. A crowd won't do. A crowd disperses at the first sign of trouble.

Jesus looked out at this crowd and he made some absolutely radical claims about the cost of discipleship. In the same way, through the preaching of his word, Jesus looks out over our assembly this morning and his words challenge us to discern whether we are truly his disciples or whether we are just mere observers in the crowd. To that end, let's consider together the cost of discipleship.

The Cost of Discipleship

Let's get right into the text. First, if you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be willing to:

1. Surrender your family

I struggle to think of a more challenging verse in the Bible than Luke 14:26. Jesus says:

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. (Luke 14:26 ESV)

Now, before we can begin to apply this text, we must be careful not to misunderstand what Jesus is saying. Numerous times in the Bible, the word "hate" is used hyperbolically to express loving something less. That's the way that Jesus is using the word here. Commentator Leon Morris explains:

There is no place in Jesus' teaching for literal hatred... Jesus' meaning is surely that the love the disciple has for him must be so great that the best of earthly loves is hatred by comparison.¹

Jesus would have you LOVE your family! But – and here is the radical challenge – Jesus tells us here that the love we have for him should far surpass the love that we have for our relatives. He tells us that our familial love should clearly and observably pale in comparison. Jesus is demanding the PRIMARY position in our affections.

Let's be honest with each other this morning; we will be tempted to love our families more than Jesus. Our spouses. Our children. Our parents. Our siblings. They are gifts from God, and yet we will feel very real temptations to take those gifts and to lift them up as idols. We will be tempted to push God from the primary position in our affections to make space for our loved ones.

Perhaps we already have. Here are some tests that we can apply to our lives:

You can be sure that your affections are out of order if your love for your family member causes you to distort or distrust God's Word. Many parents today find themselves at war with God's teaching on sexuality because they have made an idol of their children.

In a similar vein, you can be sure that your affections are out of order if your love and concern for your family member causes you to withhold from God. Perhaps you withhold your worship from God because your Sundays are all tied up with your child's pass times. Perhaps you withhold service from God because your schedule is too crammed full with music lessons and extra curriculars to ever even think about inviting the neighbor over to share the gospel with them.

You can be sure that your affections are out of order if the self-sacrificing love that you offer to your family dwarfs the self-sacrificing love that you offer to Christ. Think with me about this: Why is it so hard to find Christians who are willing to wake up 30 minutes early to spend time with the Lord in His word and so EASY to find parents who are willing to drive their kids to a 7:00AM Saturday morning hockey practice? Why is it so hard to tell our neighbors about the Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of the world but so easy to tell them about how well our children are doing at university?

Perhaps it's because we have made idols of our loved ones and subtly relegated Jesus to a back seat. If that is the case, then we need to hear Jesus' warning in this text. If he is not first in your affections, then you might be a part of the crowd, but you are not a disciple.

Second, if you would be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be willing to:

2. Surrender your life

In verse 27, Jesus said:

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

This language is all over the New Testament. Matthew records a similar discussion in which Jesus says:

¹ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 3; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 253.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24b-25 ESV)

It's difficult for us to wrap our minds around this call as North American Christians. We were BORN into ease and safety. These verses sound like hypotheticals and ideals to us. We can't even imagine a situation in which our love for Jesus would put our lives on the line.

The challenge for us this morning is to try to see beyond our fortunate circumstances and to wrap our minds around the reality that the choice of following Jesus can and does cost believers their lives. Just this past week I received an e-mail about the persecution of Christians in Eritrea, a small country on the horn of Africa. The report states:

six Christian government employees were taken to court on August 16th where the judge ordered them to renounce their faith. All six refused, saying they would not "negotiate their faith." Two days later, 80 more Christians were detained by security officials in Godayef, an area near the Asmara airport. Those detained had been taken to a police station where they were still being held at last report.²

We caught a glimpse of the plight of our brothers and sisters in India last week, didn't we? My eyes filled with tears as our brother Suraj asked us to pray for the church in India in light of the government's stated intentions of clamping down on Christians. In an already difficult cultural climate, it's about to get harder.

This text feels hypothetical to our North American ears, but it most certainly is not! Would you be willing to lay down your life today for Jesus Christ? Is Jesus worth your life? That is the cost of discipleship.

Third, if you would be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be willing to:

3. Surrender your sin

Listen to the parable that Jesus shares in verses 28-30. He asks:

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a 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.' (Luke 14:28-30 ESV)

When we invite people to follow Jesus, we must call them to count the cost. We need to be honest about the demands that Christ makes upon our lives.

When we share the gospel with someone who is addicted to drugs, we need to be clear that following Jesus means leaving the drugs behind. When we share the gospel with someone who is sleeping with their boyfriend or girlfriend, we need to be clear that Jesus is going to call them to obey him with their sexuality.

Unfortunately, when we don't call people to count the cost, we lull them into a false security. If you claim to follow Christ yet you refuse to leave your sin behind, then you are lost! You are still dead in your sins and

² Voice of the Martyrs, *Persecution and Prayer Alert* (August 29, 2019).

you are not ready to stand before the Judge. The Bible is clear about this. Earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus asks:

Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46 ESV)

If you refuse to give up your sin, then don't call yourself a Christian. You can have the sin, or you can have the Savior, but you can't have both. I don't pretend to be able to see into the hearts of men and women, but I suspect that there are some of us here this morning who have been living a lie. You started to build the tower, but you never stopped to count the cost. Now, you're at an impasse – Jesus is clearly calling you to leave your sin behind, but you're not sure that you want to. You're trying to convince yourself that you don't need to.

You do.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you must leave your sin behind. If you won't, then you have no part in him.

Finally, if you would be a disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be willing to:

4. Surrender all that you possess

Look with me at verse 33:

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33 ESV)

In Jesus' final, sweeping condition, he calls us to renounce everything in our devotion to him.

It can be difficult to wrestle through a text like this, because we immediately begin to ask questions: "What is he calling me to DO? Does he want me to sell my house so that I can give my money to the poor? How much am I allowed to keep? What does it mean to 'renounce all that I have?' Does that mean that I can keep it until he asks me to give it away? What would that look like?"

John Calvin is helpful here. He argues:

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.³

Jesus isn't making any kind of statement about what you can or cannot possess. That would be to miss the mark entirely. The point that Jesus is making is that, in order to be his disciple, you must understand completely WHO POSSESSES YOU.

To renounce all that you have is to daily say to God: I belong to you, therefore everything I have belongs to you. Do you think that way? Because a true disciple MUST think that way.

³ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King; Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 68302.

A disciple of Jesus fundamentally views his possessions differently. If and when God calls you to open one of your rooms up for an orphan, the answer should be an immediate “yes” because that room doesn’t ultimately belong to you. It belongs to Him. He gave it to you, and in following Jesus Christ, you have surrendered it back to His service. If he calls you to sell the house so as to move into a cheaper house where you will be closer to neighbours who don’t know Jesus, then you do that without a question. Everything is his. It’s all on the table all the time.

In the same way, a disciple spends his money differently. If I have renounced all that I have as a disciple of Christ, then I am going to bring my major purchases to him in prayer before moving ahead with them. If my money is his then my purchases should be in alignment with his business, shouldn’t they? Here’s a habit that will challenge your heart and change your life: Before you purchase something, surrender it to the Lord in prayer and tell him why you think you should be using God’s money to buy it.

In response to this passage, Matthew Henry wrote:

They must be willing to *quit* that which was *very dear*, and therefore must come to him thoroughly *weaned from* all their creature-comforts, and *dead* to them, so as cheerfully to part with them rather than quit their interest in Christ.⁴

Does anyone else feel like they need to be *weaned from their creature comforts*? If there is anything in your life that you wouldn’t part with for the sake of Christ – if you are too attached to your house, your savings or your toys to be of any use in Kingdom work – then Jesus is telling you here that you need to lay it down.

This is the cost of discipleship.

Now, I don’t know about you, but I feel like Jesus just punched me in the teeth. We’ve taken some time to understand the text, but I think it prompts two obvious questions:

Two Obvious Questions

The first question is:

1. Why should I submit to Jesus’ radical demands?

What kind of man makes these demands? We have to love him more than our families; more than our possessions; more than our own lives? We have to surrender EVERYTHING? Why would ANYONE do this? We must be fools!

And we are fools – unless Jesus is worth it.

As the famous missionary Jim Elliot once said:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose!⁵

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic ed. 6 vols.; (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 33781.

⁵ http://www.jesusisprecious.org/missions/he_is_no_fool.htm Accessed on Sept. 4, 2019.

This is the same Jim Elliot who would later be impaled by a spear at the hands of the native Ecuadoreans whom he attempted to share the gospel with. His wife famously returned to that tribe and led the man who murdered her husband to the Lord. The Elliots saw in Jesus what we are meant to see: That he is worth it all!

So the question is: Do you believe that?

Jesus is forcing you to come face to face with this question so that you don't miss out on the prize. Eternal peace and hope and joy and glory are waiting for you, but none of that is yours unless you first surrender yourself to carry that cross! And you won't carry that cross unless you first look to the one who gave himself for you and decide beyond the shadow of a doubt that he is worth following.

Yes, he calls you to lay it all down, but that's because he's positioning you to receive the prize that surpasses anything you could possibly imagine. Let go of what you cannot keep. Lay hold of what you cannot lose.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24b-25 ESV)

This leads to one last question:

2. How could I possibly do this?

Is anyone else asking that question?

If we've truly and honestly wrestled with the text, then each and every one of us should be freshly aware of areas in which we have fallen short of the standard that Christ has set before us. I have yet to meet the perfect disciple.

So, where do we go from here?

This morning, Jesus is addressing our hearts. He's asking you to stop and consider where your affection lies. Do you still love him? Do you still believe that following him is worth whatever cost may come?

Has your love grown cold?

Have the pleasures and the comforts of this world lulled you to sleep?

There's only one solution: Repent and ask him to give you a new heart. Be humble enough this morning to cry out to him and to confess your need for a savior. THAT'S what real discipleship looks like. The real disciple makes the decision each day to surrender. The real disciple humbles herself before the seemingly impossible task of carrying the cross and asks her Father for strength for the day.

Some of us have been running in our own strength for too long, and our witness has suffered as a result. In fact, that's where Jesus closes this teaching. In verses 34-35, Jesus says:

³⁴“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Luke 14:34-35 ESV)

Some of the salt that was used in the ancient world contained impurities. Sometimes the little sodium chloride that existed in the “salt” would be lost, and as a result you would be left with “salt” that wasn’t salt at all. It was no longer flavorful and distinct, so it was of no use for cooking. It no longer had the properties that made it effective in preserving meat. It was so worthless in fact that you wouldn’t even throw it in the manure pile because it would ruin that too!

Jesus is telling us here that a “Christian” who rejects this radical call to discipleship is worthless.

I’m not going to soften that this morning.

If we claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, but you in reality we love our comforts, our treasures, our sins, and our lives more than him, then he says here that we are of no use for the kingdom.

But if we lay our lives down – if we put it all on the table and surrender ourselves to his plan and his purposes – then who knows the wonders that he will do in our midst!

I want to conclude with this amazing quote from James S. Stewart. He wrote:

What have been the eras of the Church’s greatest influence? What have been the moments of its most powerful impact on the world? Not the epochs of its visible might and splendour; not the age of succeeding Constantine, when Christianity became imperialistic, and all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them seemed ready to bow beneath the sceptre of Christ; not the days of great medieval pontiffs, when Christ’s vicar in Rome wielded a sovereignty more absolute than that of any secular monarch on the earth... Not in such times as these has the Church exercised its strongest leverage upon the soul and conscience of the world: but in days when it has been crucified with Christ, and has counted all things but loss for His sake; days when, smitten with a great contrition and repentance, it has cried out to God from the depths.⁶

I confess to you this morning that I am going to need you to hold me accountable. I am going to be tempted to chase after a life of ease. I am going to be tempted to try to tame this radical call to discipleship.

Push me.

Let’s be a church that takes this seriously. And if we are going to have any hope of living this out then we are going to need to be entirely enraptured by our Savior! In our worship, in our prayer, in our preaching, in our talking, in our day-to-day living, let’s celebrate the glory and the splendor and the beauty of Jesus Christ! Let’s keep him front and center in our hearts so that when things get tough and the cost seems too great and we are tempted to lay our cross back down we will see him in all his glory – and we will press on.

For the glory of God, and the spread of His gospel in this city. This is the radical cost of discipleship, and this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

⁶ James S. Stewart as cited in David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 310.