

Sermon - What it means to be a disciple of Jesus

Tonight we're going to be looking through Luke 14:25-35. This is a very difficult and challenging passage, but contains some extremely important truths that are essential to being a Christian. I'll just say at the beginning, I do not live up to this standard. I'm preaching because I'm convicted of my lack of love for Christ and my selfishness.

Let's read the passage together:

**25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:
26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? 29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, 30 saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

vv 25-26 - Hating Family

Love Commands

These first two verses are very difficult to understand. They fly in the face of many Christians' understandings of God and love from other contexts. The Ten Commandments tell us to honour our mother and father, and this is reiterated by Jesus (Luke 18:20) and by Paul (Eph 6:2). In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is. He replies, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your**

mind.’ **38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** Our parents are surely included as at least a neighbour, so we are commanded to love them. In fact, we can see here that loving your neighbour is inherently related to loving God, as Jesus says that the second commandment is ‘like’ the first. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25, as well, implies that loving others is inherently related to loving God. **Verses 31-40** read:

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Here, those that care for the sick and hungry and naked are seen to be caring for Jesus.

Exodus and Deuteronomy

So there is a difficulty here - is there really an order of preference in terms of loving God and loving others? How could it ever be ok to hate your family? Well, this verse is closely related to the blessing given by Moses to the Levites in Deuteronomy 33. Moses said to them, **“He said of his father and mother, ‘I have no regard for them.’ He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children, but he watched over your word and guarded your covenant.”** Moses is referring to a time when the Levites disregarded their mothers, fathers, brothers and children. The occasion referred to here is in Exodus 32, where in Moses’ absence the Israelites

created and worshipped a golden calf. Moses stood at the edge of the camp and asked all those on the Lord's side to come to him. The Levites responded. Exodus 32:27-29 then explains what happened next.

“27 Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’” 28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. 29 Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

So the Levites are blessed because they stood with the Lord and slaughtered their family and friends - single-mindedly and without regard. This is pretty shocking right?! The Lord's people slaughtering their own family and friends - and the Lord approves? What do we do with difficult passages like this?

Do you desire God?

What we have to recognise is that God calls us to have a passion and a commitment to him which comes above everything else. He supercedes all our personal relationships, with friends, or family, or husband or wife or children. He is not calling you to not care for your family, but he is calling you to have a love for Him that comes above everything else, so that everything pales in comparison. And this is everything in your life - hence, in verse 26 of our passage, being called to hate 'even his own life.' What's essentially being asked here is, **“Do you desire God?”** Aside from everything else in your life, do you desire Him, just Him, not for what he gives you, but for Himself.

Blessing and Loving God First

Sometimes, in the church, we have a worrying attitude to blessing. We talk about God giving us the desires of our heart, if we seek the Kingdom first - although when do we ever really do that? And are we just seeking the Kingdom in order to get those desires? Do you know what the desire of your heart is, or should be? God, Himself. Why does God give us anything good, or allow anything good to be taken away, or allow anything bad to happen to us? To make us more like Christ and increase our desire for Him. Sometimes the worst thing he could do would be to give us the desires of our heart. We don't always desire the right things, and not every passion we have is put there by God. He wants us to be so focused on Him, and so concerned for

Him, that we take the gaze away from ourselves and our lives. In the last 12 months I've lost things that were very precious to me - people, dreams, future plans. Do you know what I realised after a while, after I'd got myself really miserable and distraught? I care about these things too much - I care about them more than I care about God, and that's wrong. It's wrong. It's idolatry, and that is sin. To quote **Leonard Ravenhill** - **“Anything that you love more than you love God is an idol. I don't care what it is.”** What more can God give us than His Son on the cross? Why are we not so delighted in that, that everything else is a bonus?

v27 - Denying Self and Carrying Cross

We'll come back to this a bit later, but let's go on to the next verse, **“And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”** Very similarly **Luke 9:23** reads, **“Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.””** So to be a disciple of Jesus means to deny yourself, every day. It means to deny yourself, and carry a cross - to expect to suffer for the Lord. To expect persecution and sacrifice and loss. This is radical! It is a radical denial of self-interest, a radical resistance of self-preservation. And what's more it's daily. Every day you have to wake up and say, 'Today is not about me, it's about Him.' To **'deny oneself'** is not just about going without pleasures - it is turning away from the idolatry of self-centredness.

Is your Christianity like this? Is it about you or is it about Him? Have you stopped living for you, and started living for Him? Or do you get seriously wound up when things don't go your way and life isn't making you happy? I do, all the time. I am incredibly self-centred, and need to repent of it every day, multiple times.

vv 28-33 - Parables, Giving up Everything you have

Let's go on.

28 “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? 29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, 30 saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.’

31 “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten

thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

So what are these stories getting at? Things go wrong when you attempt tasks without the resources - you have to know at the beginning what something costs before you attempt to complete it. So the context of this passage is discipleship - following Jesus. What's being asked here is, do you know what it takes to follow Jesus? And are you willing to pay it?

So what does it cost? Well so far we've seen that what's required is:

1. To desire God above everything else, in such a way that it's almost as if you hate everything else in comparison
2. To deny yourself and be willing to live for God sacrificially, even unto death, every day.

And what can we add here from **verse 33**? **“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.”** You have to give up everything. This does not mean that you literally need to have nothing in your possession. It means that everything that you have is no longer yours. It all belongs to God, and is there to serve Him. This means all your possessions aren't yours, they're His. It means all your time isn't yours, it's His. All your money isn't yours, it's His. All your dreams aren't yours, they're His. All your ambitions aren't yours, they're His. All your accomplishments aren't yours, they're His. All your desires aren't yours, they're His. And isn't this a massive problem sometimes - we don't submit all our desires to him. Abraham Kuyper, the old Dutch reformer, used to say that when Jesus returns he will stretch out his hand and take everything, and say, **“Mine, mine, mine, mine, mine! It's always been mine! It was made for me! And the only ones who will share are those who realised this from the beginning!”**

It Costs You Everything

What does becoming and being a Christian cost you? Everything...it costs you everything. Do you realise that following Christ is the end of your life? It's the end of your life being about you? Oftentimes in evangelistic messages we tell people that all it takes to become a Christian is to say a short prayer - repeat the prayer and then you're saved. Why? Why not say - if you want to

be a Christian you need to give up everything. You need to give up all your time and money and ambition. He is so amazing you won't regret it, but you might have to suffer and die for the cause. You might have to be incredibly unpopular and be ridiculed and persecuted. In fact if you follow Him this is quite likely. It's not very seeker sensitive, but isn't this what Jesus did. Let's go back to the first verse, "**Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said...**" He's not just saying this to his close friends, he's saying it to everyone. He's raising the bar high, he's being clear about the cost. Otherwise people will attempt to follow Him and then fall away when they later realise the cost, and look ridiculous like the man with the tower or the king with the army.

vv 34-35 - Salt

34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Aside from debating whether salt can lose its saltiness, the main point here is that there is a possibility of failing in discipleship. And if you do fail, you're not even worth the manure pile - you will be thrown out.

This is scary right? These are serious demands and serious claims. What does it mean to be a Christian? What is required?

1. You have to love God more than anything else - do you do that?
2. You have to carry your cross and deny yourself every day - are you doing that? What are you sacrificing? What is God calling you to sacrifice?
3. Everything you have now belongs to Him. What do you still think is yours? What are you not submitting to Him that you need to?

Why Important - 1. God is worthy

So why is this important? There are at least 2 reasons, the first being the most important. God is worthy. He deserves our worship. He deserves our love. He died for this! He gave everything. Do we not care that he gets what he deserves? When conviction comes, do we feel bad because we don't look good, or because we hate that He has been insulted and rejected and let down.

2. Mission

Secondly, the implications for mission are huge. You are called, as a Christian, to lay down your life for others, to live for God and for others and not for you. If you do not love God above everything, carry your cross, deny yourself, and give up everything you have, you will find it very difficult to lay down your life for others. It's easier to give money to people and to causes when you realise it isn't your money. It's easier to face the scorn and ridicule of people when you only really care what God thinks and you've already committed to suffering for Him if and when it's required. It's easier to give up that promotion, or popularity at work, or recognition, if you're satisfied with Him alone. You won't be doing only the things that make you feel good, that give you a lift. There is a real danger in charismatic churches of focusing only on what makes us feel good and builds our self-esteem - it's not about that. We don't evangelise because it makes us feel good. Great if it does, but it doesn't have to. We do it because we love God, we want to see His name praised and worshipped and we want Him to have His due. And because it's not about us. I don't stand in the market square preaching because I enjoy it. It's cold, it's tiring, you look stupid, people laugh at you. I do it because I think God should be declared.

We can't do it - He has to!

Let's be honest, none of us can achieve this. Even if we fully understand the cost, we'll never manage to pay it. But God knew the cost, he paid on the cross, and he can live through us now. **Philippians 3:6** "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." If God began a good work in you, he will complete it. So all we can do is throw ourselves upon his mercy, upon his grace. And what does this require? Death. We have to die, to ourselves. **Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." When you came to Christ, and when you were baptised, you died. That was the end of life being about you. But this is a continuous thing, every day you have to die again and live for Him. You have to give in and let Christ come and live through you. And this means letting all your dreams and desires be subject to Him as well. Those things and promises you think you can't live without - you can, because all you need is Him. Jesus wants us to have life to the full, and eternal life is this - knowing God (John 17:3). But the path to this life is preceded by our death, so that we can be like Christ who said he could do nothing by himself, only what he saw the Father doing, as he sought not to please himself but his Father who sent him (John 5:19, 30).

I'm a big fan of Band of Brothers. For those of you who don't know, it's a 10 part drama following the 101st Airborne Easy Company and their exploits in Europe during World War 2. Episode 3 centres around a character called Blithe, who is so paralysed by fear during early fighting that he develops hysterical blindness. One night, as he's sitting in his foxhole, Lieutenant Spiers says to him that the reason soldiers struggle is that they don't realise they're already dead. Once they realise that, they can get on with what they're there to do. We are in a battle, and victory is assured. Jesus won the victory on the cross, and we can trust in him. But to do that, we have to realise we are already dead, and that the rest of our life is living a radical sacrifice for Him. Don't worry about what will happen in all the different circumstances of your life, just be concerned with living for Him, knowing Him, loving Him - and therefore laying down your life for others.

So:

1. Do you desire God? Do you love Him above everything else? Do you have a passion for Him that exceeds everything else? If not, repent, and ask Him to change you. Even if it means removing things from your life that will hurt you and break you. I prayed at the beginning of FP, quite recklessly, that God would break me. And he did, and it was horrible, but I wouldn't change it. Because in brokenness I've found Him more than ever.
2. Are you carrying your cross and denying yourself every day? What are you sacrificing? What is he calling you to sacrifice? Have you been living for yourself and your comfort? Repent, and ask Him to change you.
3. Have you given Him everything? What do you still think is yours? Have you realised that life is not about you? It isn't. Life's not about you. It's about Him. Repent, and ask Him to change you.

This is a serious thing. If you really want to change and live for Him, he will do it in you. This will radically change your life. It might be really painful and difficult and challenging and scary. But this is all there is to live for.

For from Him, and through Him, and for Him, are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.