

Counting the Cost

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0:00] Well, what does it take to be a follower of Jesus? What does Jesus require for those who wish to become a disciple of his?

! That's our focus today, and it's what Jesus talks about as we find him walking along the road.

We're in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14, and we'll jump right in.

And then verse 25, large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them, he said, and we'll hear what he said in a moment, but for now, Luke sets the scene.

He's no longer at the house of that prominent Pharisee, as we heard last Sunday. Now he's on the road again, and Luke tells us that he's not alone. Of course, his disciples are usually with him, but there are also large crowds traveling with Jesus.

And this next teaching moment of Jesus happens on the way. That is the wrong verse.

[1:16] Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them, he said, 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.

These are shocking words, aren't they? First, we can get a little more clear of what Jesus is talking about.

Just look at the main part of this statement. I just took out part for just a moment, so we can sort of see it clearly. Jesus' main point here is, if anyone comes to me and does not, such a person cannot be my disciple.

And so Jesus is talking about what's required to be a disciple of his, what's required to be a true follower of him. And what Jesus says is required is shocking, isn't it?

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.

[2:50] Is Jesus saying that we should hate our family members? Is Jesus saying that we should hate our own lives?

Jesus was a master teacher. The best teachers know how to get the attention of their audience and how to get them thinking about things. And one very effective way to do that is to use shocking statements.

Because we kind of, you know, expect this to say the very opposite, don't we? If anyone comes to me and does not love father and mother and children and wife and brothers and sisters, and yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.

But no, that's not what Jesus says. He says that in order to be a disciple of his, we must hate our family members and even ourselves, even our own lives.

Boy, Jesus knew how to stir the pot and get us thinking. We all know, every single one of us knows that Jesus does not want us to harbor hatred towards our family members or to act out of hatred towards someone in our family.

[4:17] How do we know that? Well, Jesus makes it clear in many other teaching moments that we are to love one another. He says the greatest commandment is to love God and the second greatest is to love our neighbor as ourself.

The whole law, he says, is summed up in those two things. In love. And we hear from Jesus that we're to love one another. John 13, 35, by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Not only that, but Jesus has clearly spoken of hatred as wrong and sinful. It's a wrong that others might do to us. And he's clearly taught that we must not hate our enemies.

Instead, we are to love them and do good to them. Hatred is listed in some of those sin lists in the Bible where there's sort of a bunch of sins talked about at once.

And so if we've spent any time listening to the word of God, to Jesus, and even if we haven't, we all have a conscience and we all know that God does not want us to harbor hatred towards our family members or to act out of hatred or ill will towards our family members.

[5:38] And so, why would Jesus say this? And what does he mean by it?

Well, as I mentioned, Jesus did use shocking statements to get our attention and to get us to think. Let's just think for a moment about another shocking statement Jesus made.

Maybe you've heard this one before. Matthew 5, 29. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. Did Jesus really want his followers to be cutting off their own arms and legs and gouging out their eyes?

But this statement makes us think, doesn't it? It makes us think, why am I sinning? What's causing me to sin?

[6:54] Is it my hand? Is it my eyes? Well, Jesus will answer that question later. He says, our sinning comes from deep down inside of us.

Out of our hearts come the evil things that we do. And so the answer is no. Cutting off our arms and our legs doesn't really solve the problem. But if it could, it would be worth it.

What Jesus really meant was that we should take our own sinning very, very seriously. We should take drastic measures. We should do whatever it takes to eliminate and eradicate sin from our lives because sin will land us in hell.

It provokes the punishment of God. It's a very serious thing. Jesus used shocking language and statements to get us to think deeply about things.

And I think that's what he's doing here again in Luke chapter 14. And so what does he mean when he says to be his disciple we must hate our family members and even our own lives?

[8:07] Well, let's think about what Jesus said a little earlier in this gospel back in chapter 12.

Verse 51, he said, do you think I came to bring peace on earth?

No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other. Three against two and two against three.

They will be divided. Father against son. Mother against daughter. Jesus has already talked about how his coming causes division.

And we looked at that a few weeks ago. And it's not that Jesus wants there to be discord in a family. He understands though that this will in many cases be the result.

Some will accept him in the family while others will not. and families will be divided because of this. Fathers and sons will find themselves at odds with each other over Jesus.

[9:20] And sometimes mothers and daughters will be in conflict with each other over Jesus. And inevitably, sometimes people will have to make a difficult choice between following Jesus and family.

And I think that's what Jesus is talking about here in Luke 14. To be a disciple of mine, to follow me, you must hate your family.

You must think way lower of your family than of me. you must love them so much less than me.

Listen to how Jesus says it on another occasion. We hear this from Matthew's gospel. Matthew 10, 37. Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. So we are to love Jesus so much more than even the most precious people in our lives is what Jesus is saying.

[10:42] Only if we love him more are we worthy of him. Can we be a true disciple of Jesus?

Because sometimes we have to choose.

between them. Another way to understand the word hate in this teaching of Jesus is like this.

How many of you have ever had a moment where you wanted something and somebody else wanted something different and you kind of had a conflict over this and you were dead set against each other and you won't budge because what you want that's what you think is best.

And they won't budge because what they want they think that's what's best. And when you won't give in to them what sometimes they say in that moment? You hate me.

Samson's first wife even said this to him thousands of years ago because he wouldn't tell her the answer to a riddle. You hate me. You don't really love me. maybe you've heard this from someone

in your life maybe a kid in your home you've decided firmly that they can't do something that they want to do because you know as a parent that it's best for them and they want to do it so badly and they say you hate me.

[12:11] when someone doesn't affirm you and bless you in a desire that you have it can sure feel like that can't it?

You hate me. All I want right now is this thing and I know it's good for me and so if you won't agree with that and help me with that and go along with it then you hate me.

Sometimes in order to follow Jesus we must do contrary to what our loved ones think is best for us. They may even accuse us of hating them. They may feel like we hate them because our loyalty seems stronger to Jesus than it does to our own flesh and blood.

And I think that's what Jesus is saying here. To follow me, to be my disciple, you must be ready, you must be willing to go against father or mother or wife or children or brother and sister.

[13:28] These are the most precious family relationships that we have and Jesus is saying to follow me you must love me more than them. your loyalty, your commitment to me must be greater than it is to them.

This is radical, isn't it? I mean Jesus is calling for our allegiance with these words.

Not just our belief or our trust, he's requiring our highest allegiance. and if we won't give that to him then he says, such a person cannot be my disciple.

And Jesus is just getting started. Then he takes it to the next level. He says it's not just our family relationships that we have to sacrifice on the altar in order to follow Jesus, but our very selves, our own lives, we must give to him as well.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple. Jesus speaks about this many times.

[14:51] We'll just listen to a few of the other ways he says it and I think it comes clear what he means. Look at what he said in the Gospel of John chapter 12 verse 25.

Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Or what we heard earlier in Luke 9 verse 24, for whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

But whoever loses their life for me will save it. In other words, there are things in life that we must give up and lose in order to follow Jesus.

And it's of course not that we actually hate ourselves but that we choose to deny ourselves things in this world and in this life for the sake of Christ.

And it may to others at times look like yeah that guy what is he doing with his life he's missing out on everything maybe we choose to forego illicit pleasures or refuse to participate in certain activities you know and the message of our world is well you gotta love yourself you gotta live for yourself but Jesus is saying the opposite here he says to follow me you have to live for me you gotta love me far above yourself verse 27 Jesus goes on he says whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple we heard Jesus say almost the same thing back in chapter 9 whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me carrying the cross was a familiar picture to the people in

[16:54] Jesus day that's what the Romans made criminals do criminals who had been sentenced to death for serious crimes they forced them to carry a wooden cross to the place where they would be executed and what's maybe surprising about this is that Jesus is using this as the illustration the metaphor and it hasn't happened to him yet that's still later in the story and so even before it happens Jesus he's saying I know how it's going to go for me and he uses this language to describe what's required for those who wish to follow him and be his disciples to be my disciple you must be willing to do what you will see me do later on you must be willing to follow me to your own death to hate your own life so much that you would give it up for me and so what kind of followers is

Jesus looking for what are the requirements to be a disciple of him well Jesus paints a very serious picture here he's looking for a love and a loyalty to him that is greater than the love and loyalty we have to our own families he's looking for a willingness to lay down our own lives and what we want for him and to follow him even if it means that we're rejected and killed for it and then Jesus gives us two illustrations to reinforce this truth verse 28 he says 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 for if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it everyone who sees it will ridicule you saying

this person began to build and wasn't able to finish or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king won't he first sit down and consider whether he's able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000 if he's not able he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace in the same way those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples so Jesus gives us these two illustrations and they sort of share a main point and the main point is simply this consider very carefully the cost of following me before you go any further because the cost is high it would be foolish to start building a building before you know whether you have enough money to finish it somewhere here in Davidson I can't remember the exact street maybe you've seen it there's an unfinished house and it's it's a concrete foundation or basement and some walls and there's plywood over top of the doors and windows where they should be there's no roof there's trees and all kinds of weeds just growing out of control in this property to be honest I don't even know the story behind it but it sure stands out like a sore thumb a building that was started somebody went to all the work of excavating it the basement digging the hole doing that foundation work I'm not even really sure what kind of walls those are but all that was put in for time and effort and money was a waste because it's now just sitting there ugly and useless it's good for nothing what happened who did that didn't they first sit down and count the cost

I don't know maybe somebody's going to enlighten me and tell me they know the story I'd love to know Jesus' second illustration is about kings going to battle well we don't see many kings going to battle with their soldiers in our days but we might find some similarities to this sort of war illustration in our modern times as we look at the current conflicts happening in the world who started them and did they really sit down and count the cost I heard in a news piece this week that the US is finally pulling out of Iraq not Iran but Iraq and it makes me wonder did they have any idea when they first went in 2003 to go after Saddam Hussein that they would still be there 23 years later I'm not going to get all political and we're not going to go into all that but the point is this it's foolish to commit to a course of action that has serious consequences without first giving it sober reflection and consideration that's

Jesus point here this is almost the opposite of what we hear sometimes from preachers come follow Jesus it's easy it's better and there is some real truth to that there are some things that get easier and there are some things that get better but Jesus himself also said it will be hard and being a disciple comes at a great cost and what is that cost well Jesus states it as plain as can be verse 33 in the same way those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples that's what it means to hate your own life or to lose your life for Jesus it means to give up everything you have in order to follow him now we need to be clear here

[23:52] Jesus is not saying that we have to do this before we become a follower of his this isn't a price that we pay to sort of buy salvation as if it could be bought salvation can't be bought it's free it's a gift the kingdom of God is free it's a gift we enter by faith and by faith alone and not by works that we do all we need to do to be saved is to repent and believe but true faith in Jesus must also own him not just as savior but also as lord in Jesus we do not just get a sacrifice offered for our sins but also along with that a king who requires our allegiance when we first put our trust in Jesus and repent and believe we confess what we know of our sins to him but from then on we learn more and more of what it is to follow him and what else in our lives we must surrender to him as part of following him we get a new life he comes to live inside of us he works in our hearts and our new aim becomes to please him and not just ourselves from then on we continue to learn what it means to follow

Jesus and to obey his commands and we must make an effort from then on to bring every area of our life every aspect of our lives under his command under his lordship and right at the beginning Jesus does not hide that this is how it must be for those who come to him he just states it plainly right up front he doesn't push people or coerce people to make the decision quickly without first counting the cost here he is surrounded by crowds large crowds and he's saying are you willing to go against your family your mother your father your dad your mom your spouse your children if it comes to that because that's what is required to be one of my disciples are you willing to give me your very life and everything in it because that's what's required to be one of my disciples this hits us hard in a few places first of course we have to ask the question of whether or not we are truly a disciple of Jesus have you become a disciple of Jesus and if the answer is no

Jesus wants you to consider the cost this is here for you he wants you to know that it will cost you everything no less than everything he's looking for a total devotion a total surrender of your life to him and nothing less and if we have become a disciple then we're challenged here are we not are there things in my life that I'm withholding from Jesus he asks for all and so we must give all is there anything that you have been holding back from Jesus that you need to offer up to Jesus I know many of you in this room have surrendered your life to him and are following him you are a disciple and I feel this burden this morning to press on us that when we hear

Jesus command to go and make disciples of all nations that we need to have this understanding of a disciple in our minds the temptation here is to invite people to check Jesus out and to just put before them some of the promises of blessing and leave it at that we're tempted to hide these words of Jesus about the cost we're tempted to encourage people to make the quick decision but does Jesus sound in a rush to get quick decisions I mean this is an urgent matter we've heard Jesus emphasize the urgency he said the time's coming when the door of salvation will be shut it is an urgent matter time is of the essence but you must first sit down and consider the cost and the cost is everything but we fear don't we that if we tell that to our loved ones or our friends we fear that it will push them away and so maybe we soften that part where we just leave it out could it be that this is why we have so many attending churches today who are so minimally committed to Christ can barely make it a priority to gather with his people once a month don't really bother to do a lot of the stuff that Jesus has commanded us to do we've made it easier to be a Christian than Jesus made it maybe that's why we have so many who are Christian in name only believe in their hearts kind of but don't really follow Jesus with their lives so I want to encourage you not only to tell people that you're praying for them and you want to see them in heaven someday but tell them that to be a true disciple of Jesus it will cost them everything Jesus is worthy of our everything and they need to hear that you may have noticed that we've only heard about the cost of being a disciple of Jesus what about the benefit amazingly there's nothing in this particular passage about the benefit and I wish we had another 15 minutes to go to some of those other passages in

[30:57] Luke's gospel and elsewhere where we read of the wonderful benefits and rewards of following Jesus the gospel of Luke alone is full of it we've talked about it lots the kingdom of God but as we bring this to a close and as we move into the Lord's table I want to go a different direction how do we know that Jesus is worthy of our everything he's asking for our highest allegiance he's asking to be the greatest love in our life is he really worthy of that I think the place that we see that most clearly comes later in the story Jesus finally does get to Jerusalem and there he carries his cross for us he denies himself for us he surrenders and gives up his own life for us he allows himself to be treated terribly and gives up everything for us many of you know the story he's betrayed by one of his own disciples he eats the last supper with them he tells about how his body and blood will soon be broken and poured out for them so that they might be forgiven he talks about that new covenant that he's bringing about between

God and them and not long after that he's arrested in the garden after praying in anguish of soul but he is willing to suffer and die to save us he is interrogated he is mocked he's insulted he's beaten he's tried and found innocent beaten more mocked more and then finally he's made to carry a cross to the place that he will be executed when they arrive there he is stripped naked and nailed to that cross and they hang him up to die a very painful death none of which he deserved he was the perfect sinless son of

God but he did it all for us out of love for us to restore that relationship between God and us what kind of king would do that for his people what kind of God would bleed for those who he created what kind of person would willingly give up his life and endure such shame and pain for self centered sinners like you and me is Jesus worthy of our everything our highest love our total allegiance he truly is we're going to take some time now just to pray and to reflect quietly and then we'll pass around the bread and the cup but take these moments now to talk to the Lord about your relationship with him to surrender things in your life to him to thank him for the things that he has done for you and once we've had a couple minutes to do that

I'll invite Tom and Dave to come up and pass out the bread and the cup and if you are all in to follow Jesus then this table is for you and I invite you to participate and if not then I ask that you just let them pass it on by you we'll wait till everybody has been served and then we'll give thanks and we'll eat and drink all together let's pray father in heaven as we hold these things in our hands we join ourselves to those men who sat around the table with you Jesus and we remember what you did for

us we can't help in these moments but think of our own sins and the things that we have done and we lay those at your feet and we thank you that you have made atonement for us we say you are worthy and we surrender ourselves completely to you thank you for your body and your blood in your name we pray amen