

The Priority of Discipleship

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[0 : 00] Well, it is good to be here. Just lovely to be welcomed and to see old friends and people we're looking forward to getting to know.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the privilege of gathering as your people. Thank you for the privilege of gathering before your word. As Andrew said, we thank you that you are the living word and that you speak words that are true.

And that your Holy Spirit testifies to your son, the word. Tonight, as we open your word, please speak in and through it to us that we may become more like him, more obedient and more open to your work of grace at work in and through us.

We pray all these things in Jesus name. Amen. Well, friends, you might like to keep your Bibles open at Luke 14 for I'll be addressing my comments to that passage this morning, this evening. I don't know about you, but it seems to me that we live at a time where there are many voices to listen to. That is, there are clearly many voices competing for our attention, aren't there?

[1 : 13] There are voices telling us how to be healthy and wealthy and wise. Voices that would influence what we do with our time. And voices that would influence what we do with our money.

Voices from without and voices from within. Influencing our thoughts and our feelings. What voices should we listen to?

And which ones should we ignore? Well, isn't it great that as we gather as God's people this evening that Jesus has a voice? He has a voice.

He's speaking to us. But what is he saying to us? What is Jesus saying about life and faith? What's he saying about discipleship? And what's that got to do with us, you and me? For if you think about it, Jesus' words in Luke chapter 14 are shocking, aren't they?

How so, I hear you ask. Well, imagine a politician who said, if you vote for me, you're voting to lose your home, your families, and all you hold dear.

[2 : 20] Who's with me? But isn't that what Jesus is saying in Luke chapter 14? Now imagine the leader of a rescue expedition.

He's taking emergency supplies to people who are isolated, people who are in danger. If you come with me, he says, some of you may not make it back.

So think carefully before you come. Clearly, Jesus is more like the leader of the expedition than the politician.

But nonetheless, his message is still an uncomfortable one, isn't it? So according to Jesus, what are the priorities of discipleship? Well, again, as we look at that, please have your Bibles open with me now at Luke 14.

Now, before we look at Jesus' priorities, some background. To really understand this passage that was read, we see that it's sandwiched between the parable of the great banquet, verse 15 and following, and the importance of being salty in verse 34 at the other end.

[3 : 34] So they're really like bookends. And the banquet parable is alluding to Jesus' ministry, isn't it? What's Jesus been doing? He's been moving around Galilee speaking about God's kingdom.

Here, the kingdom is compared to a party or a banquet. And the king of the kingdom has a message. And what is that message?

It is simply, come. Come to the party. Come. God's love is for you. Come. It is for everyone. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, insiders and outsiders.

God wants you to come. It was and is a radical message of God's love and grace for people who don't deserve it.

This is what Israel, this is what the Jews, this is what God's people have been waiting for. The coming of the kingdom and the coming of a king.

[4 : 42] But when the king arrives and this radical message goes out, what do we see?

We see in this parable that people had other priorities. See the excuses. Jesus is asking people to come and we see people saying, or we see people saying, by way of excuse, no, I'm too busy. I'm buying fields and cows, falling in love and getting married. In other words, the king has come and his people, God's people, are getting on with the business of life.

Now, please understand, Jesus is not denying the place of marriage. Or relationships. He's simply pointing out that when the king says, the king says, come, when the king says, follow me, everything else is put aside or put into perspective because he's the number one priority.

And then Jesus finishes the passage by talking about salt. Verse 34, salt's a preservative, it adds flavour. In other words, Israel, God's people, are meant to be the salt of the earth.

[6 : 01] That is, they're meant to add flavour to God's world. But they weren't. They weren't doing that.

Why? Because they had other priorities. But then Jesus confronts them. You really can only be my people if you follow me.

You can only be my people if you live with me as king. It's a choice to be made every day. To follow or not follow Jesus, that's the choice.

Because if we lose our saltiness, what use are we to Jesus? So, what is it that makes us salty?

What is it that makes us stand out?

What is it that makes us add flavour to God's world? Well, according to Luke 15, it is life lived according to Jesus' priorities.

[7 : 05] But what are they? What are the priorities of discipleship? Well, in Luke 24, verses 25 to 35, Jesus says there are three. Firstly, it's about loving Jesus more.

You'll need your Bibles open here. Hear these words again. If you come to me and don't hate mother, father, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, children, indeed your own life, you can't be my disciple.

What's Jesus doing? Of course he is using hyperbolic language, isn't he? He's saying your love for him is to be so great, so great, that by comparison, everything else looks like hate.

It's not denying the importance of family. But if there is a task to be done, or a decision to be made, where does our ultimate allegiance lie?

What's your priority? So to love Jesus more doesn't mean you love family less than you do now.

[8 : 25] In fact, it should mean that you're more loving towards them. One who loves Jesus more should become more loving, not less.

More committed to relationships, not less. More caring, not less. How about you?

That was my experience when I became a Christian. I became a Christian at 19. And my parents noticed I became, thankfully, they noticed I became more caring, more concerned, more compassionate.

That is, friends, I was so overwhelmed by Jesus' love and mercy and kindness for me, I wanted to share that with others. And it was noticeable to my parents.

There were challenges too. My parents had a clear idea about what was important. But when I became a Christian, what was important to me had changed.

[9 : 34] Sometimes loving Jesus more meant I made choices that my unbelieving parents disagreed with. And there was a cost associated with that.

But again, ask ourselves the question, who do you please, ultimately? Is it family? Or is it Jesus? Indeed, loving Jesus more will also affect how we see or how you see everything. We may value many things, including education, learning, but if they get in the way of loving Jesus more, they must be rejected.

Okay, so the priority of discipleship is clear. You can love family. You can love other people. You can love many things, even learning itself, but you must love Jesus more.

Secondly, it's about daily obedience. Jesus talks about picking up your cross. Anyone who does not carry his cross, can it be my disciple? For Jesus, the cross meant suffering and service and sacrifice.

[10 : 52] It meant rejection by the world. For us, it means saying each day, Lord, I want to put you first no matter the cost. Now, I don't know about you, but sometimes that's easier said than done, isn't it?

Do you ever feel like this? Some mornings I wake up and I say, God, really, I'm sick of being a Christian. Do you ever feel that way? I'm sick of being nice, sick of being good, sick of thinking of others.

It's all a bit of a pain. It'd be nice to have a day off being a Christian. I just want to think about me today. Does that ring a bell?

But then there's this voice that pops into my head. Livo, that's my nickname. That's what people call me. Livo, have you received some special news or some special revelation during the middle of the night?

What do you mean? Well, is the gospel true? Yes. Is the Bible the word of God? Yes. So Jesus really did come?

[12:02] Yes. That is, he really did live and die and rise from the dead? Absolutely. He sat at God's right hand side.

One day he's coming to judge for living in the dead. Yes. Well, then you better get on with it then. You better get on with it. Friends, the decision to pick up our cross each day and obey Jesus is a daily decision.

Just as the decision to talk to God and the decision to read his word is a daily decision to be made. It has to do with obedience.

It's not really about emotions and feelings at that point. It's the same with our understanding of what it means to be the church, to be God's people. As the church gathered, our decision to gather and give God all praise, our decision to follow Christ, will have us asking all the time, Lord, what a privilege it is to be a part of your people.

How may I serve you? We won't be asking each Sunday, well, I've got many things I could be doing. Is there a better offer rather than going to church?

[13:21] No, we'll gather as God's people asking, how can we give God praise? How can we serve him? But also, as the church scattered, which is what we're about to do shortly as we go out into the world, we'll be asking, if the gospel is good news, how can I obey the Lord Jesus by making time for relationships?

And how can I obey Jesus by preparing myself for conversations with people who don't know the Lord Jesus as opportunities arise? Now, as disciples, that may involve suffering and rejection.

Of course, you can avoid all of this by being like the world and by conforming to its standards. But Jesus says the priority of discipleship is clear, daily obedience.

Without it, you can't be my disciple. Thirdly, and finally, Jesus says it's about giving up everything. It's about giving up everything.

Jesus says, any one of you who does not give up everything can't be my disciple. In other words, Jesus is asking for an all or nothing commitment.

[14:41] And if we're not ready for that, we're a bit like the builder or the king that he talks about by way of illustration in verses 28 to 33. Look at what's said about them.

Of course, the image of the king in the battle and the tower was a direct warning to the Jews of which is his immediate context as he speaks these radical words.

He's speaking to Jews and at that time Herod, who was their temporal ruler, was involved in rebuilding and re-beautifying the temple.

But for what purpose? For in his ministry, Jesus had already rejected the temple, had already said in effect that God is not there.

It was all for nothing. Jesus predicted that within 40 years that very edifice, that very building, the temple, would be completely destroyed. It's the same with the image of the king who's not prepared for war.

[15:53] Of course, many Jews hope to fight and rid themselves of Roman rule. But like that king, had the Jews really thought about who the Romans were?

Arguably, one of the great military forces in all of recorded history. Had they really thought about who the Romans were?

No. Defeating Rome, regaining their ancestral land, was all that mattered to them. And when Jesus came, the true king, they couldn't see it.

Defeating Rome was all that mattered. But when Jesus, their real king, came, they were not ready. Their priorities were all wrong. Now, isn't it the same for us today?

Are we ready to face up, really ready to face up to Jesus' demands? Or is it the demands of this world that come first? What buildings or towers would the world have us build?

[17 : 01] What wars would the world have us fight? In reality, it may be about education or status or career or lifestyle. It may be about what others think of us.

It may be about our possessions or the size of our superannuation. They might have a place in our lives but Jesus is saying they must not get in the way of putting him first.

With Jesus, it's an all or nothing commitment. Anyone who does not give up everything, any one of you, cannot be my disciple.

And I don't think Jesus means that all Christians must sell their possessions. People normally look at this passage and think of it from a socio-economic perspective, although clearly it is in part about that.

What Jesus is really doing is claiming ownership of our possessions so that we're now stewards and not owners of the good gifts that God has given us. So when it comes to material possessions, the priority of discipleship is clear.

[18 : 12] We don't say this is mine but this is yours, God. What do you want me to do with it? We say, Lord, thank you for all that you've given me. How can I use it for your glory?

It's a very different attitude and priority to what the world teaches, isn't it? But moreover, when Jesus says, give up everything, I really do think he has everything in mind.

It's not just material possessions. Everything includes the use of our gifts and our abilities. Let's just tease this out very quickly.

What do we imagine ourselves doing with our lives? And what does that mean? What do we imagine we'll learn? How do we see ourselves developing as people as the years go by?

They're all important questions, aren't they? But if in any of these things we see any wrong motivations or anything that does not honour God, Jesus says, give it up.

[19 : 23] Jesus is saying, hand it over to me. In all of this, Jesus is now claiming ownership of everything, including our gifts, our abilities and our motives.

Disciples, he wants to say not only in what we learn and develop, but why we want to learn and why we want to develop.

So when it comes to all of this, the priority of discipleship is clear, isn't it? We say, Lord, thank you for all that you've given me. How can I use it for your glory?

It's a very different attitude and priority to what the world teaches. Now, you may be thinking as you think about these very radical words from Luke 14, you may be thinking, does Jesus have the right to make these demands of us?

Does he have the right to demand these priorities? Well, he's not asking anything of us that he didn't ask of himself. Think about it, he loved his father more than his earthly family.

[20 : 39] He literally carried his cross. He was not concerned with material possessions. So what is the priority of discipleship? Well, according to Luke 14, it's this.

Jesus challenged the crowd and challenges us to put him first. What's that about? It's about loving Jesus more. It's about daily obedience, picking up your cross.

And it's about giving up everything for Jesus. Without these three things, Jesus says, without them, you cannot be my disciple. Now, I'm going to stop at that point and hand it over to Claire and she's really, in effect, going to continue, I guess, illustrating what that looks like from our perspective.

As people who want to take the demands and priorities of Jesus seriously and in a sense have been prepared to play a part as his kingdom is spread throughout the world.

And in this instance, French-speaking Switzerland. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.