

The Priority of Discipleship (Alternate to 11-10-15 PM)

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[0 : 00] Lord God, we thank you that we can gather as your people.

Thank you for your word. Please speak to us now in and through it. Amen. Well, if you think about it, friends, Jesus' words are confronting and shocking, aren't they?

How so? Well, imagine a politician who said, if you vote for me, you're voting to lose your homes, your families, and all you hold dear. Who's with me? But isn't this what Jesus is saying in these verses from Luke 14?

Be helpful to have this chapter in the Bible open in front of you. So now imagine the leader of a rescue expedition. He's taking emergency supplies to people who are isolated and in danger.

If you come with me, he says, some of you may not make it back. So think very carefully before you come. Clearly, Jesus is more like the leader of the expedition than the politician.

[1 : 13] But nonetheless, his message is still an uncomfortable one. According to Jesus, what are the priorities of discipleship? Oh, you might like to look at me now as we have a think about that from this passage in Luke 14.

But before we look at Jesus' priorities, some background. To understand the passage that was read, please 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.

They're like bookends. The banquet parable is alluding to Jesus' ministry, isn't it? Now, what's Jesus been doing? He's been moving around Galilee, speaking about God's kingdom.

And here, the kingdom of God is compared to a party or a banquet. And the king of the kingdom has a message, doesn't he?

It's simply, come to the party. 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.

[2 : 27] The king wants you to come. It was and is a message of God's love and grace, which is undeserved. This is what Israel, this is what God's people had been waiting for.

The coming of the kingdom and the coming of a king. But when the king arrives and the message goes out, what do we see? We see that people had other priorities and see their excuses in verse 18 and following, buying fields and cows, falling in love and getting married.

The king has come and his people are getting on with all the business of life. Now please understand, now please understand, Jesus is not denying the place of commerce or marriage.

He's simply pointing out that when the king says, come, follow me, everything else is put aside or put into perspective because he is the number one priority.

Then Jesus finishes the passage by talking about salt in verse 34. Salts are preservative, but we all, we also know that it adds flavor.

[3 : 49] Israel was meant to be the salt of the earth. That is adding flavor to God's world. But they weren't. We see that they had other priorities.

But then Jesus confronts them. You can only be God's people if you follow me. You can only be my people if you live with me as king.

Now 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 the Lord Jesus Christ?

Or to put it another way, what is it then that makes us salty? What is it then that makes us stand out? Well, according to Luke 14, it's life lived according to Jesus' priorities.

And what are they? What are the priorities of discipleship? Well, in this passage from Luke 14, Jesus says very clearly there are three. Firstly, it's about loving Jesus more.

[5 : 01] Look at these very challenging words. If you come to me and don't hate father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, indeed your own life, you can't be my disciple.

Jesus is using hyperbolic language. He's saying that your love for him is to be so great that by comparison, everything else will look like hate.

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

So what's your priority? So to love Jesus more doesn't mean that you love family less than you do now. In fact, it should mean 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.

[6 : 17] That was my experience when I became a Christian. My parents noticed I became more caring, more concerned, more compassionate.

I was overwhelmed by the love and grace and mercy of God. And I wanted to share that and show that in my life with others. But there were challenges too.

My parents had a clear idea about what was important and what my priorities should be. But when I became a Christian, what was important for me, do you see, had changed.

Sometimes loving Jesus more meant I made choices that my unbelieving parents disagreed with. That's the cost. Who do you please?

Family? Parents? Or Jesus? Indeed, loving Jesus more will also affect how you see everything. Friends, we may value many things in this life, including education and learning, but if they get in the way of loving Jesus more, then they must be rejected.

[7 : 31] Now this is a big challenge for us as members of families. This is a big challenge for us as parents of families. It's a challenge in how we raise our children.

How will we be a model to them? And what values, gospel values, will we pass on to them? So the priority of discipleship is clear.

You can love family, you can love other people, you can love many, many things, and even learning and life itself, but you must love Jesus more.

Secondly, we're told it's about daily obedience. See what it says there? Jesus talks about picking up your cross. Anyone who does not carry his cross cannot be my disciple.

Now for Jesus, the cross meant sacrifice, meant suffering, it meant rejection by the world. For us it means saying each day, Lord, I want to put you first no matter the cost.

[8 : 44] Friends, the decision to pick up our cross and obey Jesus is a daily decision. Just as the decision to talk to God and read his word is a daily decision.

It has to do with obedience. It's not really about emotions or feelings. It's the same with our understanding of what it means to be the church.

As the church gathered, our decision to obey Christ will have us asking, Lord, how can I serve your people? It's not, well, this day do I feel like going to church or not?

But also, as the church scattered, we'll be asking, how can I make time for relationships? And how can I obey Jesus by preparing myself for conversations with people who don't know Jesus as the opportunities arise?

Now, as disciples, that may involve suffering and rejection. And this may come from what we decide to do, but can equally come from deciding not to do certain things.

[9 : 53] you know, I've known people who have foregone some professional learning, some development, even some promotional opportunities to follow Christ.

They've put down roots in a local church, they've been actively involved in mission and outreach and partnering with the gospel over many, many years in a particular congregation like here in Doncaster.

Why are they doing that? They want to be obedient disciples. But equally, I've known others who followed Christ by moving regularly. They cultivated a Christian mind in their learning and applied that to their profession so that they can serve Christ, they can be salt and light in the different spheres and occupations that they are placed in.

Again, why are they doing it? because they want to be obedient disciples. So Jesus says the priority of discipleship is clear.

Daily obedience, without it, you can't be my disciple. Jesus is asking for an all or nothing commitment. And finally, he says, discipleship is about giving up everything.

[11 : 15] Anyone who does not give up everything can't be my disciple. Jesus is asking for an all or nothing commitment. And it begs the question, are we prepared for this?

If we're not ready for that, we're a bit like the builder or the king in verses 28 to 33. Look at how they're described. The image of the tower and the king was a direct warning to the Jews.

at that time, Herod was rebuilding and rebeautifying the temple. But for what purpose? Jesus had already rejected the temple.

He'd already said that God was not there and within 40 years, he predicted that that entire temple, that entire complex would be completely destroyed. it's the same with the image of the king.

Preparing for war, considering the cost, for many Jews hoped to fight and rid themselves of Roman rule. But like that king, had the Jews really thought about who the Romans were?

[12 : 31] Arguably one of the most sophisticated and ruthless military forces the world has ever seen. Had they really thought about that? No. Defeating Rome was all that mattered.

But had they really considered the cost of what defeating Rome would involve? So that when Jesus, their real king, came, what do we see?

We see that they were not ready, for their priorities were all wrong. That's very sobering, isn't it? Because isn't it the same for us today?

Are we ready to face up to Jesus' demands? Or is it the demands of this world that come first? That is, if you use the metaphor, what are the buildings or towers that the world would have us build?

What are the wars that the world would have us fight? Now, it may be about education or career or lifestyle. It may be about our identity and what other people think of us.

[13 : 35] It may be about our possessions or the size of our superannuation. Now, these things might have a place in our lives, but they mustn't get in the way of putting Jesus first.

For with Jesus, it's an all or nothing commitment. Any of you who does not give up everything cannot be my disciple.

it's a very different attitude. It's a very different priority to what the world teaches us, isn't it?

Moreover, when Jesus says giving up everything, I think he has everything in mind, including the use of our gifts and our talents and our abilities. And so, if in any of these things we see any wrong motivations, or anything that does not honour God, Jesus says give it up.

Jesus is saying hand it over to me. In all of this, Jesus is now claiming ownership, ownership of everything, including our gifts, including our abilities, even our motives.

[14 : 51] As disciples, he wants a say not only in what we learn, if we think about education, but why we want to learn and develop as people. So, when it comes to all of this, the priority of discipleship is very clear, isn't it?

We say, Lord, thank you for all that you've given me. How can I use it for your glory? And again, as we think about all these things, it's a very different attitude, it's a very different priority from what the world teaches.

Now, friends, you may be thinking, does Jesus have the right to demand these priorities of us? Well, as we think about the gospel story, as we think about what we read, think about what we know, he's not asking anything of us that he did ask of himself.

That is, he loved his father more than his earthly family. He literally carried the cross. he was not concerned with material possessions.

What's the priority of discipleship? Well, Jesus challenged the crowd and he's challenging us, you and me today, to put him first. That's about loving Jesus more.

[16 : 14] That's about daily obedience, picking up your cross. Jesus and that's about giving up everything for Jesus. Without these three things, Jesus says, you cannot be my disciple.

Well, after 25 years in parish ministry in Melbourne, three years ago, you