

Luke 14:25-35 AM

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 01] Heavenly Father, we beg you now to increase your grace in us so that we might hear and receive what you say and increase the fire of your spirit in our hearts that we might love Jesus and see him above everything else.

And we pray these things in his name. Amen. Please sit down. And if you turn back in your Bible in the seat to Luke 14, page 874, these are some of the most challenging words of Jesus in all the New Testament.

The long account of the meal with the Pharisees is over. The Pharisees are all saying, thank goodness. And Jesus is now again on the road to Jerusalem and a massive crowd have joined him. They've kind of joined the bandwagon, the Jesus bandwagon you'll see in the first verse. And Jesus stops and turns and puts everyone, everyone in the crowd on notice with the clearest and most demanding description of what it is to be a disciple.

And we want to say to Jesus, nah, it's not the way you create a religion, Jesus. I mean, these are people who are excited about him, some of whom want to become disciples.

[1 : 29] You know, they love his healings. And they especially like it when he skewers the religious hypocrites. And they're enjoying proximity to him and they're eating and drinking and listening to his teaching.

And Jesus warns them in no uncertain terms that discipleship is not to be entered into wantonly, unadvisedly or lightly. Or as he says in verses 26 and 27, unless you hate your family, unless you bear your own cross, unless you renounce all you have, you cannot be my disciple, you cannot be my disciple, you cannot be my disciple.

And we find Jesus' grace hard to understand over the last weeks. Because of our pride or because we think we're unworthy, we find his grace really hard to accept.

But we also find this just as hard, I think. And there are two temptations that we come to a passage like this to avoid. The first is not really to take Jesus seriously.

Explain it away. You know, it's just Hebrew hyperbole. It doesn't really mean what he's saying here. He's just saying, ah, we need to have him as our first priority.

[2 : 43] Try and put him above other things. And I think that completely misses the point. And it makes us into salt that's lost its flavour and is of no use.

That's the first danger. The second temptation is not to take the context seriously. And do you remember the context since the beginning of this series in chapter 13 has been about grace, grace, grace.

The overriding reality is the madness, this crazy upside-down calculation of grace and how Jesus has come to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. Irrespective of our badness, irrespective of our goodness, he pictures the kingdom as this great feast which he's come to open the door through his death so that we might enter in.

And he overturns all our transactional relational calculations to the joy of God forever. But he said, remember, we have to enter by the narrow door.

And though he has been focused on grace, this passage shows more of what it means to enter by the narrow door and truly become and remain his disciples.

[3 : 56] And I think the passage raises three very obvious questions. And the first is this. Who does Jesus think he is? Doesn't it raise that question in you?

I mean, just as we read this, look at verse 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.

Or 33. Yes, so therefore anyone who does not renounce all he has, that's possessions, cannot be my disciple. I say, really? I have a five-year-old granddaughter?
And when she thinks you're joking, she says, oh, come on. And I think if we're honest, we say it as, oh, come on. I mean, most of the commentators point out that Jesus, he doesn't really mean hate here.

That would be to disagree with the fifth commandment as well as his later teaching in the gospel. We can't take one part of the Bible to contradict with another. And how can this man who taught us to love even our enemies call us to hate our closest family?

[5 : 08] And they argue that Jesus really, he just means we should love our families less than we do Jesus. That he's talking about our priorities as a disciple.

So we want to tone this passage down a bit and take the edge off and make it more acceptable and more doable. So it becomes whoever loves his family more than me cannot be my disciple, as it is in Matthew's gospel.

There's some truth in that approach, but I think it misses the point again. Because the key is this passage is not just about discipleship.

At its deepest root, at its deepest level, it is about who Jesus thinks that he is. What Jesus is doing to the crowd and what Jesus is doing with us is he is making a daring divine claim to be God.

You think about the first statement he makes. It's very like the first commandment that God makes in the Old Testament. You are to love me and to fear me above all other gods.

[6 : 15] You are to have no other gods but me because there are no other gods. Jesus steps straight into that space, that frame of God, and applies it to himself.

See? It is a blatant claim to be God. No one but God has the possible right to demand this ultimate loyalty of us.

So he takes our nearest and dearest relationships, our children, our spouses, and he says to us, my bond with you is of a different order.

It's not just that I am one priority amongst the others and I need to be the first priority, as though he could accept a place among our many relationships. He's saying I am in a completely separate category from everything else in life, even your most cherished possessions.

I am the eternal God in the flesh, the maker, the savior, the judge. And in thinking about this during the week, I don't think there's any illustration of this that we can come up with.

[7 : 23] There's nothing in our world or in human relationships to say and to show what sort of different category Jesus is in from everything else.

I mean, it's not like comparing a little toy car with a space rocket or a drop with an ocean because they are fundamentally comparisons of size, but they're basically the same thing.

Whereas Jesus is the man from heaven. He is the king of God. He's the one who's come to seek and to save the lost. He's God in the flesh, the incarnation of God's love to bring us eternal life, to bring us the forgiveness of sins, to bring us purpose in this life and the Holy Spirit and there is nothing and there is no one who comes close to the value of knowing and following him.

Nothing. That's what he's saying. And that is why it's so important to nest this passage in the context of the greatness of his grace to us.

Because it's only because of his grace and his mercy to us that these things become possible to us. Let me just think about it for a minute. Let's say Jesus only did 70% of saving me by his grace.

[8 : 43] If it's only 70% his grace, then I can give him 70% of my heart. I only need to do that. I can hold back 30% if he holds back on me.

But since he has given all of everything of himself for us, then he can demand everything for us because of who he is and what he's done. He's not a narcissist, an insecure God who's trying to get us to serve him blindly.

He's the king of love. He's the king of glory. He reveals his heart by weeping over Jerusalem, comes from heaven, dies in our place, opens the narrow door and in his death he goes to the bottom of hell and back again to bring us into the feast, the great banquet with God where we feast on the love of God.

That's who he is. So when he speaks about our money and our reputation and our family, it's not just that he takes precedence and they should take priorities two and three and four.

But since he is the Lord of glory who has given his all for us, what we do is we take all those things and all the things of our life and all our loves and we lay them down at his feet, including the best

gifts that he's given us.

[10:03] That's who Jesus thinks he is, point one. I think the second question is this, what's wrong with these good things, these normal things of life? And the answer is there's nothing.

What's wrong is that the problem's in me. And you notice Jesus deliberately chooses those things that are so close to us, that cling so closely.

These are our normal affections and loves. And he does this deliberately to show the radical nature of our following him. So the following him is not something you can add on the weekends to your already busy life.

He's not another, he's not something we consume. He requires all, and if needed, the readiness to give up on anything.

We are to count everything as loss for the sake of gaining Christ. But more than that, when we come after Jesus and begin to be his disciple, it drastically changes all our other relationships and how we deal with the things that we love.

[11:11] I want to take the first one in verse 26, our fathers and mothers and our wives and our children and our brothers and sisters. When we come to Jesus, what he does is he turns us back to our family so that we treasure them in a whole new way.

They become more precious to us in a way, not because they are there for what you can get from them, but now because of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, because of what we can give to them, we take a whole new view of our family.

They belong to God. They're made in the image of God, eternally valuable through Christ's death. Again, again, these are not all competing goods in our lives.

It's really about who we truly worship. It's about what forms my hopes and my dreams and my values so that when you think about your family or your reputation or your investments, they haven't come down from heaven to serve you and save you.

Your family hasn't gone to the cross and died and risen for you. These things can't offer eternal life and entry into the kingdom of God. They are gifts from God for us to treasure, but we are to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ through those gifts because they are not Jesus himself.

[12:34] They are not there to pull us away from Christ. They are there for us to pull up to Christ, you see. So coming after Jesus means beginning to love our families as Jesus does, placing them at his feet, praying for them, seeking God's grace for them.

What does it mean that we should hate our own lives? In verse 26, well, it's the same thing as coming after him in verse 27 and bearing our cross.

And here is the thing about crucifixion. Crucifixion is not... The point of Jesus using crucifixion here is not because it's the most excruciating, painful and agonising death, nor because it's just utter shame and humiliation.

Crucifixion maximised. But when you saw a person in the Middle East who was carrying their cross, they were a dead man. They were a dead woman. When you saw someone bearing their cross on the way to death, their normal life had come to an end and they were walking in this strange place between life and death where death was an absolute certainty.

And all the things that made up their life, their normal life, getting married and investments and property and all that sort of stuff, all their preferences and all their goals, they're gone. They're not thinking about that now so much.

[14:00] Just so. For everyone who comes after the Lord Jesus Christ, our cross isn't the little troubles that we suffer. Taking up our cross means our lives are now about Christ, that we've set ourselves to follow the one who died for us.

And the cross of Jesus Christ now shapes our lives and our decisions. Follow the one who for the joy set before him endured the cross. And it's the same with our possessions.

As Jordan said last week, problem with possessions, they come to possess us. They take more of our heart than Jesus. They can. And he's already taught us, hasn't he, that life doesn't consist in the abundance of possessions.

And it is possible for the cares of this life, riches, pleasures, to choke out the word of God in us. Not because they're evil in themselves, but because our hearts are so easily distracted and led astray. So each day, we bring our families and our children and our marriages and our futures and our possessions into the hands of Jesus for him to do with as he wishes.

[15:12] But there's a third and final question, I think, that we need that comes to mind and might be in your mind. And that is, can I really trust Jesus with all this?

I mean, it does seem a bit extreme, doesn't it? You know, I'm not really sure if I'm ready for this kind of commitment yet. I'm not sure if Jesus and I are completely compatible.

I'm used to holding back in relationships. I find it hard to trust. And if you are holding back and you know you are, Jesus gives two wonderful parables in verses 28 to 32.

The first is about setting up to build a tower and neglecting to count the cost and finding you get halfway through and can't finish it. So all your friends and neighbours come along and laugh at you. Jesus is saying, don't start out as a disciple unless you're willing to see it through. Don't start out unless you intend to be fully committed. Now, I should say at this point that nobody knows what that means.

[16:17] It's like, every time I marry a young couple, I don't say this, but I feel like saying, you've got no idea what this is going to mean. It's the same with coming to Jesus.

And Jesus is giving us a heart check here. And there's a second parable. The king is facing, he's facing an attacking army that's coming against him with twice the number of soldiers.

What do you, will you send for peace or are you done for, right? And if the first parable means we need to reckon with the cost of following him, the second parable means we need to reckon with the cost of not following him.

Because he speaks with all the authority of God again. And I think after you've been a Christian for a year or two, it's so easy to take Jesus' words for granted here.

Throughout this section, Jesus has spoken calmly and evenly and certainly about the future. Every time he speaks about the banquet, he says, I know who will be inside, who will be outside and why.

[17:20] And what exactly God the host will say and what excuses will be offered and swept away. And he knows that those who are outside will weep and grind their teeth in anger and regret. And here he is setting his face to go to Jerusalem to reveal the love of God with blinding clarity and to show the lengths he's willing to go to save us.

The one who will be pierced for our transgressions, by whose wounds we are healed. Who's come to bring us to glory and the joy of the feast forever? He's saying, count the cost of not following me. And I think that's the point of the salt picture in 34 and 35. In those days, if salt lost its saltiness, it was of no use. And I think that's a picture of someone who starts out in the Christian life, but holds back.

Doesn't allow Jesus Christ to be all in all. Holding back and refusing the transforming grace that comes from the cross as we take up the cross and put everything at the feet of Jesus.

When we do that, then our lives are salty. Our words have bite. Otherwise, we become religious copies of the Vancouver culture. If we hold out on Jesus, we lose our unique Jesus zest and spice, which is a great pity because it's only as we're different from those around us, only as we serve Christ, that we will be truly loving and able to help people.

[18:57] So, that's the end of Luke 14. Who does Jesus think he is? Well, he's God, the creator and saviour in the flesh. He's the one who's come to embody the grace of God for us and he's absolutely confident to call on us to give our all to him, that this will be the best thing for us.

And when we do, all the good gifts that God's given to us in our life, they begin to change. They move from being chains that hold us down to opportunities for us to show how wonderful and worthy the Lord Jesus is.

And that means it's just not possible to play it safe with Jesus. It's just not possible to hold back on him or follow him on your own terms or follow him at a distance or without full commitment.

So, let's pray that the grace of God would give us a heart to be fully committed to the Lord Jesus today and always. Amen. blessed by Amen.

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