

The Cost of Discipleship

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together to the last of those readings, Luke chapter 14, and reading at verse 25 once again. Luke chapter 14, and reading at verse 25, Now great crowds accompanied Jesus, and he turned and said to them, 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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you desiring to build a tower does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king going out to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and deliberate, whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot.

Be my disciple. I remember many years ago, before I ever even started preparing for the ministry, I was in Germany.

And I had to be there over a weekend. And on the Saturday, I went into the city of Munich just to look around. It was a usual Saturday afternoon, hustle and bustle and lots of crowds, etc. And in the center of Munich, where I was, there was this great pedestrian square and lots of things going on. And I happened to notice that there was a great crowd of people around one particular individual who was juggling. He was a jester. And he had attracted probably hundreds of people. And there was a huge amount of interest and entertainment and laughter and clapping, etc. And not so far away, there was another man who had a Bible in his hand. Now, I couldn't understand a word of what he was saying, but I can only guess that he was speaking about the Bible and trying to preach the Bible. And there can't have been any more than about two or three people standing listening to him. Your natural senses told you that you wanted to be where the crowd was rather than being where two or three were. And I've never forgotten that as a kind of a picture of the world in which we live. The world where there are crowds and they've all gathered to be entertained. And a world also at the other end of the spectrum which has absolutely no interest whatsoever in what God has to say to us. And that's the world that you and I live in today. But imagine for a moment that it was the opposite. Imagine tonight that Jesus was the celebrity. Imagine everyone was talking about Jesus for some reason. Perhaps the press took an interest in him and rediscovered his significance and his place in history, his teaching, his person, his mystery, his power. And perhaps instead tonight of crowds flocking into cinemas as they do, they decided that they would flock into churches. It's almost impossible to believe, isn't it? Impossible to imagine that all of a sudden, and I'm not saying that those crowds would be converted, but just out of interest, a fascination in Jesus, a renewed discovery of who this man Jesus was. Imagine that happened tonight all across our country and our churches were full of people. And inside here tonight, the place would be bursting, all of a sudden bursting at the seams. What text would I choose if that was the case?

I have to confess to you that if that happened, I would be terrified with one question, one thought. Make sure you don't lose them.

And that's exactly the situation that took place when Jesus walked through the streets of Galilee and in Jerusalem and the towns and villages, healing people, teaching people, talking to people, debating with people. He was the talk of the town. People were coming from everywhere. When we read here in verse 25, great crowds accompanied him. That means hundreds and hundreds of people thronging through the streets, waiting to see what he was going to do next or waiting to hear what he was going to say next.

[5 : 46] He was the celebrity at that time. Everyone knew about him and everyone recognized him and they all wanted to go and be where Jesus was. It's hard to imagine in our 21st century secular atheistic world, but that's the way it was. Now here this crowd are and they're not heart followers of Jesus, but they're interested. They want to know more about him. They want to see him. They want to hear him.

You would imagine, wouldn't you, that Jesus would try his best to keep their interest in him, that he would try his best to make sure that he didn't lose any of them. He would want more and more and more, and yet he does the very opposite.

He ends up offending loads of people. Just at the very point, this wasn't the first time he did this.

He did this on several different occasions, just when it appeared that there was such interest in him. He seems to have this knack, if you read through the Gospels, he seems to have this knack of just saying the wrong thing, things that drive people away. Instead of keeping their interest, he seems to put them off. Probably the most famous of these was in John chapter 6, where a whole crowd of people, once again, they followed Jesus, and Jesus ended up saying to them, unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you.

Now, I'll tell you, if that makes you and I feel sick, it made them feel even sicker. And from that time, John 6 tells us that many of them turned their back on them and they said, this is a hard saying, we can't accept this. And from then on, nobody followed him anymore.

[7 : 46] He seems to have this way of just putting it in such a way that causes offense. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever would save his life would lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. And even when it appeared that there were individuals who wanted truly to follow him, like in Matthew chapter 8 and verse 18, he says, he says, teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus, instead of welcoming him as one of his followers, he says, foxes of holes and birds of the air of nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. And I can only conclude from Jesus' answer that Jesus was able to see into that man's heart and see that his commitment was not total.

And that is the point of the gospel. That is the point of what we read here in this short passage.

That whilst our salvation is free, there is a cost to being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 04] And that cost is, in a word, everything. I would be lying this evening if I told you it was, oh, I'm tempted, so tempted to say, well, you know, but we have to take everything.

Everything. That's what Jesus, these are not my words. Look at the end of this passage, verse 33. So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Now, that's as plain as the nose on your face. All that he has cannot be my disciple. So, let me say that again.

Whilst the gospel, whilst our salvation is free. Let me just, let's just stop there and remind ourselves what I mean by that. Salvation is free.

You can't earn your own salvation. You cannot make yourself right with God. You could be the most respectable, law-abiding, faithful, nice, pleasant, loving person in here tonight or in the whole of the Isle of Lewis.

[10 : 24] And still, you are not right with God if you're depending upon your niceness and your respectability to get you into heaven. You cannot earn your way into heaven.

It doesn't matter how faithful you are. Perhaps some of the older ones here are deeply offended at me saying that. And you're saying, after all these years, trying my best, paying money into the church, following and trying to attend the church faithfully and supporting the church in everything it tries to do, you're telling me that I can't, that I'm no better than anyone else.

I didn't say that. I said this, that all your efforts, even if it's a lifetime of efforts, will not earn you into the kingdom of heaven.

It doesn't matter how good you are. And the reason is simply this, because your sins are not forgiven and they won't be forgiven until you discover what Jesus did for you on the cross.

And that's free. When you discover what Jesus did for you on the cross and come to faith in him, then you will discover that you can't do anything to earn your salvation and that your salvation is free.

[11 : 50] It doesn't cost anything. And even if that means you having to confess that all your lifetime of effort has gone for nothing, well, that's too bad. I say, hallelujah.

You've discovered it. And you've discovered the greatest thing in all the world. When you discover Jesus Christ and what he did for you in paying the price for your sin on the cross.

So our salvation is free. And yet, when it comes to living the life of a disciple, and anyone who follows Jesus is his disciple, and he must live the life of a disciple, that is costly.

And it costs us everything. Everything that we are and everything that we have. It costs me myself.

It costs me my way of life. My loves, my preferences, my dreams, my lifestyle, my ambition, my talents, everything that I am and everything that I have must go to the Lord, and it must be yielded to the Lord.

[13 : 15] I'm not just talking about the sinful things in our lives. Anyone knows that in order to come to faith in Jesus Christ, there has to be repentance.

And what that means is that we turn away from what is sinful in our lives. But here, Jesus is not just talking about the things that are sinful. He's talking about everything, every single aspect of our lives.

Verse 33, let me read it again. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Even to the point of the things and the people that are closest to us in this world. Let's read this passage just once again from 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.

[14 : 18] Now, let's just stop at that verse here and let's just try and unpack it because, of course, there is a cause for concern here. Is Jesus actually, truly suggesting that anyone who's a disciple of his must hate his father and his mother and his wife and his children?

And if so, how does that sit with what's in the rest of the Bible? Like, for example, you were considering this morning the Ten Commandments. Commandment number five says, Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God gives you.

Now, how can you honor your father if you hate them? How can you truly, Paul says, love husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her?

How can you reconcile what Paul says that husbands must love their wives and wives must love their husbands with what Jesus is saying, if anyone comes after me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers?

And says, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Well, what Jesus is talking about here is our allegiance to the Lord, which means that it turns our loyalty, our affection, our focus, our orientation, the orientation of our lives, the direction in which our lives go in our heart, our mind, our soul.

[15 : 55] When a person comes to Jesus, it belongs, all of us belong to Jesus. And our allegiance to him is such, so great, that all our other loves would appear as hatred.

That's what Brian Salter says. That's the way he puts it. Let me put that again. Allegiance so great that all your other loves would appear as hatred.

Jesus is not suggesting for a moment that you start hating your family. Jesus himself loved his mother. There was nobody who loved his mother as Jesus from beginning to end, from the moment that he became conscious of her existence.

And it's amazing, isn't it, to think of there being a time when Jesus himself was not conscious in his human nature of the very existence of his mother, but he was a baby. And that meant that he slept most of the time.

And when he didn't sleep, he fed the other time. And when he didn't feed, he cried. Same as every other baby who was just newly born. Completely unconscious of who his mother was.

[17 : 07] It's amazing, isn't it? We're not just talking about an ordinary human being. We're talking about God and man. And yet, from the moment of his consciousness, nobody loved his mother like Jesus.

And that scene, if you look at his crucifixion, the account of his crucifixion, where he makes provision even on the cross, as his mother stood there weeping at the cross, heartbroken that her son was now being crucified by the Romans and he was dying in agony and there wasn't a single thing.

She would have given her life for him. She would have replaced him on the cross. But she couldn't do that. There wasn't a single thing that she could do to bring any comfort to his agony.

And yet, even in the midst of his anguish and his darkness, he still says to John, behold your mother. He's making provision for her. He's making sure that she's taken care of.

What was it that motivated such provision? Well, it was his love for his mother. The affection that he had for her.

[18 : 20] She had brought him up. He owed to her his very life and his provision and his upbringing. Now, this does not mean that we hate our family.

Of course it doesn't. Paul says to husbands, love your wives. In fact, in fact, there's a sense in which a Christian family ought to display more love for each other than a family who aren't following the Lord because their love is rooted in the love of God.

There's a sense that when a husband is converted he becomes a better husband or he ought to become a better husband towards his wife because his love for her is rooted in love for the Lord and vice versa.

That's why it's commanded to us. You know, we live in a world where love is just a feeling, isn't it? And it can be there one day and it can be gone the next and if it's gone one day, well, that's just too bad it happens, doesn't it?

No, says the Bible. It doesn't happen because God's love doesn't fade away. And so the love that we have in our families towards our parents and our brothers and sisters if we're following Jesus ought to be a steady, steadfast, immovable love.

[19 : 42] I'm not saying we always feel the same way but there ought to be that dependency upon us that is rooted in the dependency of Jesus Christ.

You don't wake up one morning and Christ has abandoned us? No, he hasn't because his love is steadfast towards an unworthy people, the very people that don't deserve it.

So whatever Jesus means by these words, he is not trying to undermine family love. In fact, the very opposite. But what he says is this, that when it comes to our allegiance and our affection and our commitment and our consecration towards the Lord, then it's as if the love that we have in this world kind of fade away.

They kind of go into the background so it becomes almost like hatred. See, Jesus very often uses strong, shocking language in order to bring about a point.

Like, for example, when he says in Matthew's gospel, he says, if your right eye offend you, pluck it out. If your right hand offends you, cut it off or it's better for you to enter into life with one hand than it is for you to enter into darkness.

[21 : 06] Now, he's not talking literally any more than he was talking literally when he said that you must drink the blood of Jesus and eat his flesh in order to live. No, he wasn't talking literally at all.

He's not suggesting for a moment that we begin to hate our wives and our husbands. What he's saying is he's expressing the love, the commitment that we have for God.

It pushes everything else as it were into the background so that God takes the very first place in our lives. And what that means is, if you read on, he says in verse 24, whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me can be my disciple for which one of you desiring to build a tower.

Now, what he's saying there, he's trying, he's, he's, he's, he's, he's, yes, in verse 27, I just lost that for a moment.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Well, Jesus is, in a word, telling those who are would-be followers, those who are fascinated by him, those who want to know more about him and want to know what makes him tick.

[22 : 20] Who is this man? What has he come here to do? What has he come here to tell us? And how can I be part? How can I be part of this, this movement? Well, says Jesus, this is how you can, there's only one way in which you can be part.

It's not a movement, it's the message that I have come to die for, to give you, the life that I have come to die. But, he says, if you're really going to follow me, do you know what?

It means that you have to die. That means that everything that you are up until this moment has to go.

It means that everything that is included in my life has to be taken when you come, when a person comes to faith in Jesus, it's like he takes everything that belongs to him, not just the material things, but what he is.

He takes the sinful things, he takes the good things, he takes the indifferent things, he takes everything that belongs to him and he comes to the cross and he lays them right there. And he arises a new person and that person is a follower of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 38] What that means is that Jesus comes first in everything that he is and everything that he does. I would be lying if I was to say otherwise.

You see, the easy thing for me today is to just preach an easy gospel. No problem. It would be so much easier if I could say, well, you know, it's all a matter of how you look at things.

It's all a matter of your perspective on things and when we take into account this and that, well, it's okay, everything's going to be okay in the end. But it's not.

If I'm preaching this, if I'm teaching this faithfully, I have to reiterate again and again, you see, there's nothing clearer than the words of Jesus. And the words of Jesus is this, so therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot, cannot be my disciple.

I've been in lots of conversations with people over this and very often when you talk to people about the gospel, the conversation turns to one subject. How will my life change if I was to become a Christian?

[24 : 49] What will I have to give up if I become a follower of Jesus? You've had this conversation. Either if you're not a Christian tonight, you've asked that question and if you are a Christian tonight, you've probably spoken to someone and they've asked that same question.

It's as common as anything. It always arises, doesn't it? What will I have to, how will my life change? And what you mean by that is there are certain elements in my life that mean so much to me, I could not bear to think of my life without them.

So is there any way that I could be a follower of Jesus and keep my life as it is because I rather like these things in my life. I can't bear to think of letting them go.

And if there were some way in which we could just work something out with God, where I could stay as I am and just bolt God onto what I have at the moment, it's like what Alistair Campbell says, we don't do God.

God. A Christian doesn't do God either. He doesn't bolt God onto his life as if he's some kind of added extra, some kind of optional extra to have when he wants them and when he doesn't want them, he just leaves them but he keeps them for a rainy day.

[26 : 19] That's not what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is someone for whom God is everything and everything that he has has been laid and surrendered to the will of God.

And so if you're asking tonight, how must my life change? And if the reason you're asking that question is because you really don't want your life to change, then you really don't, you haven't got it.

You haven't understood that this is Jesus. commanding us and inviting us in his love to surrender our all to him.

Now I would have thought that simply because it's Jesus, then it has to be right. And after all, what did we read before? What does it profit a man or a woman if he gains the whole world?

And that's talking about the things that you can't let go of. You know that your life is going to come to an end. And you know that whatever happiness that your life brings you at the moment, it's not complete happiness.

[27 : 28] It's not complete contentment because you know that there's something missing. And the missing element is the central element. It's God. God is the gap in your life. The gap is God.

And you'll discover God when you come in all that you are. In your emptiness and in your need. bringing all your questions and your doubts and your insecurities and your fears and saying to God, Lord, I just am so confused because there are things in my life that I feel I can't live without.

But I know also that if I don't give that life to you, I am lost. Why don't you say that to the Lord? Lord, if that's the way it is with you tonight, why don't you say to him?

Don't just say to yourself, go to the Lord and tell him everything about yourself. You can be absolutely honest with God. You don't need to hold anything back.

He knows what you are. He knows who you are and he knows how to change you. He knows how to remold you and refashion you.

[28 : 41] He knows how to work within you to change your direction towards himself. Now perhaps you're saying tonight, well, you talk about dying with Christ and living a life that has died with Jesus.

How can I live a life that has died with Jesus? What does it mean to live a life that has died with Jesus? Well, I'll tell you, you can't do it by yourself.

You can't wake up in the morning and say, I'm going to live today as a dead person. No, it has to, our death has to be tied. There's only one way in which we can die and that is with Jesus.

And that's what Paul meant when he says, I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives within me and the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

The only way we can die is to die in and with Jesus Christ. That's what happens. When a person comes to faith in Jesus, that person dies.

[29 : 53] the person I once was before I became a Christian, that person is dead. The old Ivor Martin is dead.

That's why Paul says, if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. That's what he also means in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 3 where he says, we have died and our life is hid with Christ in God.

In Corinthians, Paul says this, we're always carrying about the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our bodies. In other words, a Christian is a living death.

He's a walking dead. That's what Jesus means when he tells us to take up our cross. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Now, look at what he says. He doesn't say to bear my cross, although there is a connection. He said, you have to bear your own cross. What is your own cross? Well, when someone bore his cross, when he carried his cross at the time of Jesus, just like Jesus did, that person was condemned.

[31 : 08] That person was the scum of the earth. And as you carried your cross all the way out through Jerusalem to Calvary, where you knew you were going to be put to death in the most agonizing manner, you had to walk all the way and the eyes of the world were upon you and they hated you.

They despised you. You were the lowest of the low. You had no status and no place in society. society. And that's why my friend in Germany with a Bible had nobody listening to him.

That's why tonight very few people will take us seriously when we start talking to them about the gospel. people. Because for many people, particularly in an atheistic and in a secular world, we belong to the dark ages.

people. You're willing to be a medieval person in this world.

That's what people are going to think about you. An idiot. A fool. They're going to tell you you're wasting your life.

[32 : 32] They're going to tell you you haven't wakened up. they're going to tell you that all of this belief stuff is for the weak in society. It's because you've been indoctrinated in all the wrong things.

You haven't read the right books. You haven't been educated. You've listened to all the wrong voices. That's what it means, or at least part of what it means, to carry your own cross.

The disciples, for the disciples, it meant literally being willing to be put to death for the sake of Jesus Christ. Now, perhaps, and again, I see that the time has gone, perhaps there are some of you here this evening and you're saying, well, that's some way to put us all off, becoming a Christian.

You've really done it now. If there was any hope of persuading those who are on the border, those who are on the edge, to start following Jesus, you've just blown it.

No, I haven't. Because if you really see and discover your own need of the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing will put you off.

[33 : 48] in fact, the very cost of being a disciple will be one more reason why you will follow him. See, the gospel has a power in itself.

The gospel itself is its own power. It doesn't need my persuasive gift of the gab. It doesn't. God doesn't need an eloquent, flowery preacher.

God's own truth, once it comes home to us, and once the Holy Spirit brings it home to us, will open up our hearts and draw us to Jesus.

And I want to ask you tonight to think of your life in this world compared to all of eternity. and I want to ask you, I want to challenge you tonight. Are you investing all that you are only in this short-term happiness in this world?

Or are you prepared to come to Jesus who can give you everlasting life? and to know that everlasting life, to know his salvation, to come to discover what he can do for you, is a contentment and a happiness within ourselves which can face any kind of challenge in this life, knowing that God is with us as our Savior, as our Lord, as our Shepherd, as our King, to be able to say, if God is for us, who can be against us?

[35 : 33] There are many ways of inviting you to come to Christ tonight. Normally, I would say something like, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, like Paul said to the Philippian jailer, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Or I could say, come and trust. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to him with all your heart. Or I could say, ask him to be your Savior.

And all of these things would be true. Tonight, I'm going to put it a little bit differently. Come to him and die.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father in heaven, we pray, Lord, that your word will do its own work in our hearts.

We give thanks, Lord, for it. We thank you, Lord, even for the discomfort that it brings to us. Lord, we pray that you will give us a sense of proportion and balance and that nothing that we say or do in the pulpit may pervert your word in any way.

[36 : 51] we ask, Lord, that you will show us what it is to follow Jesus. We can't do it by ourselves. And there is every voice within us that says, don't do it and stay as you are and stay, keep the life that you have.

And yet, Lord, there is that one voice, the voice of God that seems to overshadow everything else because we know that it's the truth. And we don't want to invest our lives in gaining what we can out of this world and losing our own soul.

Our Father in heaven, so show us, Lord, how to follow Jesus. Show us what it means to come to faith in Him and show us, Lord, what you can do for us in Jesus, what you have done for us in the death of your Son.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.