

Cross Bearing Disciples

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, chapter 14. And this section, I'll just read from verse 25.

Now great crowds accompanied him, 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. Now as we know, Jesus is on his journey here to Jerusalem.

And Jesus is single-minded in his approach to Jerusalem because he knows that ahead of him there, there is betrayal, there is arrest, there is a trial, there are beatings, and ultimately there is to be the crucifixion.

And it required great love and great commitment in the heart of Jesus to take this journey. And we must never underestimate that because remember, Jesus is here in our nature.

[1 : 15] Jesus was often tempted to take an easier route, often tempted to bypass the way of the cross.

Because let's remember, this was an incredibly difficult task that he had to face. We find something of just how awful it was in his experience where we find him in Gethsemane.

And he's saying, you know, Father, if it be possible, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Then he says, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

I've said this before, when we come to the Lord's Supper, we pass a cup one to another. And often we look into that cup and we see there the wine, the redness of the wine.

I remember when I was a wee boy, it always used to fascinate me. I always wanted to be able to see into the cup. Well, Jesus was looking into that cup, but he wasn't seeing, in a sense, the red wine that we're looking in.

[2 : 25] Because in the Old Testament, it talks about different kinds of cups. There was the cup of God's wrath. There was the cup termed the wine of astonishment.

And that's what Jesus was seeing, because he knew he had to drink that. Where he had to go and receive in himself, and take upon himself the punishment for our sin.

And that is why his holy soul recoiled from what he was seeing in Gethsemane, and said, If it were possible, if it possible, let this cup pass, but not my will be done but thine.

And so we find here that Jesus has this commitment, absolute commitment, to what he has to do. And that's what Jesus is spelling out for us as well.

That there has to be commitment from us too. And to be a Christian means, Jesus is showing, giving your all. Not turning back after a wee while when things get tough.

[3 : 28] Not saying, oh well, I think I made a mistake. Try this Christianity thing and, no, I think I would prefer some other route. To be a Christian involves giving your all.

That's what the Lord shows us. And Jesus spells it out very clearly for us. And that's one of the great things about how the Lord deals with us. Jesus doesn't say, follow me, and I'll tell you the rest later on.

Just you follow me, and I'll explain to you later on how it's going to be. What sort of things may happen in your way. You know, often we find that sort of thing happening in life.

You know how you, maybe you sign up to something or for something. And when you initially look at it and read it and say, boy, that's fine. And you say to yourself, this will do me.

This looks pretty good. But then after you've signed up, you begin to find that there's loads of other things that you hadn't noticed. There's little small print. There's things that all of a sudden you're finding, and maybe you're having to pay for this and pay this.

[4 : 36] And say, I didn't know there were all these things. And in a sense, there's almost an element of deception. And, you know, I often think sometimes in the wee, wee small print, which is deliberately small print, so that we're not liable maybe to note it, but it's there to cover people, that we can be tricked a wee bit.

Well, Jesus doesn't do that. There's no small print with regard to what he sets out before us. He doesn't say to us, right, you follow me, and you will receive nothing but blessing in this life. Of course, in following Jesus Christ, there is blessing, incredible blessing. There are blessings that are so great that we wouldn't trade in being a Christian for anything. The blessing of peace. The blessing of identity. The blessing of belonging. The blessing of knowing why you're here. The blessing of knowing where you're going. These are blessings that you cannot put a price on. These are blessings that so enrich your life. The blessing of God's love. Shed abroad in your heart.

[5 : 49] There are loads of blessings. And our Lord tells us we could spend this Sunday morning and the next number of Sunday mornings just looking and identifying at many of the great blessings that Jesus Christ gives us.

And while these are true, and all that is true, Jesus also tells us. And that's the beauty of it. He doesn't hide anything. He says, by following me, it's not going to be in this world always a bed of roses.

It may be, but it might not be. And Jesus sets out very clearly how it will often be. And Jesus shows us that discipleship can be tough.

Because using the very word cross straightaway indicates to us that it's not always going to be plain sailing. And yet, through it all, the Lord will always give us his grace.

And then Jesus gets right to the point. And what he says at the beginning here, maybe people find strange. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

[7 : 06] Now, the word hate, the meaning of hate, here carries a comparative force. By that, we mean that Jesus is comparing it.

What Jesus is saying is, if you are forced to choose between me and everything else which is dear to you, you have to choose me.

Our own life and our own family are the most precious relationships that we have in this world.

What the friends, family, our own life.

I'm sure we look at, our life is governed and we are involved with so many things. And there are so many things that make life wonderful and precious and great for us. But at the end of the day, you can strip away, you can say, well, I can do without this and I can do without that if I'm forced to. I can do without the next thing. But when we come right down, and if we're to go through all the different layers of what we have in life, and strip it right down, we'd find that when we come down, we'd be left, if we're going right down, taking all the layers, we'd come down to family and our own life.

[8 : 25] And Jesus is saying, I've gone taking you all the way down there, right, right, right, right, all the way down. And when it comes to the point where a choice has to be made between me and even your family or your own life, it's got to be me.

Now, that might be hard for us in our present circumstances here. It might be hard for many. It might not be hard for everybody. But it was very true, and it's still true to this day, that many people who become Christians lose everything in this life that is precious to them.

There are many people who are, when they become Christians, are disowned by their family. And that must be one of the toughest things that anybody has to bear.

Where all of a sudden a family say, I don't want you. You do not belong to us. And it's happening. It's happening all over the world.

And that's the very point that Jesus is making. And that this is what's going to happen. Where people, by becoming Christians, are going to lose family, and they're even going to lose their own life.

[9 : 37] And it's happening to this very day. Where people are being martyred because they love the Lord Jesus Christ. It's happening all over the world. It might not be at the top of the news items, but it is happening.

And those who are involved in looking at the oppression and atrocities and all the things that happen in this world are so often highlighting the fact that the Christian church is suffering throughout this world.

And this is the very point that Jesus is making. That sometimes people are going to have to forfeit their family and their life. And this is what Jesus is saying. It's going to be tough.

And so Jesus shows that commitment to himself. And we're looking at it here, as it were, from our point of view. Jesus is saying, before you begin to follow me, sit down and think what it involves, what it costs.

Now, again, this is looking at it maybe in a totally different way to... You see, when God is working in a person's life, and God is drawing it to himself, you're not maybe sitting down and analyzing and saying to yourself, what is going on, kind of...

[10:51] But there are times when we are challenged. Challenged by Christ and saying, right, do I throw in my lot or not?

And I'm sure some of you have been challenged, and some of you have actually wrestled with this question. The reason I'm saying that is because I remember myself sitting in the pew wrestling with these very questions.

Saying to myself, I want to be a Christian. I know I should be a Christian. But I'm not prepared for the cost of Christianity. I remember thinking like that.

And saying, if I become a Christian, it's going to cost me. And choosing to reject Jesus. I hope that there's nobody here today deliberately making that choice.

God in his mercy took me over that. God in his mercy took me over that. I hope there's nobody today rejecting Jesus when you're looking at the cost. But Jesus says, yeah, this is what happens.

[11:57] And he points it out and he says, gives two little illustrations about a man who's going to build a tower. Or we could put it to any project if you're going to build anything. Supposing you're going to build a house.

You would first of all work out, look, can I afford to do so? Can I afford to build a house? This is the kind of house I would like to build. Can I afford to build it? If you can't, well, it would be kind of madness to launch out and then halfway through discover, I can't do any more.

And people would be passing by and they would be looking at this half-built house year after year. And they'd be saying, oh, well, you know, he was foolish, that man. I think there's a, I'm not, I'm not all to get, I might be totally wrong.

There's a big tower in Obern. I think it's McCaig's Folly. And I don't know if this is what happened. This man building the tower and had to give up. Couldn't finish it. I don't know if that's exactly the history of it.

But that's, I think, what it's called. And the second illustration he has is of a king who is going to have to go to war. And he's got an assessment to make out, right, he says.

[13:06] I've got 10,000 troops. The enemy coming against me has 20,000. Am I able with 10,000 to defeat that enemy?

And he'll work out and says, well, maybe I cannot. And if I can't, then he's going to have to try and negotiate. So Jesus is saying to us, look, following me is serious business.

And I want you to think over the seriousness of it. Yes, it's the most important thing in the world. But I want you to be aware of the cost. Because it's not just a matter of somebody saying one day, you know, I think I'll follow.

I think I'll start following Jesus. I think that's what I'll do. I want to give Christianity a shot. I want to begin to see how it goes.

And I'm sure that there are people who actually, that's what they do. They look at the whole setup and they say to themselves, you know, that's good teaching. And some people may say, you know, I quite fancy being part of a group or a fellowship in a church.

[14:11] I think I'll give that a shot. I'll give it a try. That's the sort of thing Jesus is saying. This is not what we do. This is not what people are to do. And then after a wee while say, ah, you know, I was a bit mistaken.

It's like, remember the two people, obstinate and pliable in the pilgrim's progress that went after Christian. When Christian left the city of destruction, they were the deputation sent to try and get Christian back.

And Christian began to tell them about the celestial city. Oh, he said, I've got to leave that place. I've got to leave the city of destruction. And they said, where are you going? And he began to talk to them about heaven because his Bible had shown him by if he could only get rid of all his sins and discover this freedom in Christ, he would be taken to heaven.

And he began to talk to them about the glory of heaven. And obstinate, I said, I'm not going to listen to any more of that. And he turned back. But pliable thought, oh, I like what I'm hearing.

And pliable threw in his lot with Christian. He says, oh, I'm in with you in this. I'll go. I'm on my way to heaven. And he began to walk with Christian for a wee while.

[15:33] And remember how they fell into this great big bog, the slough of Despond. And they were both sinking in this marsh. And Christian made his way across.

And he struggled and came out the other side. But pliable just went back. And he said, if this is what it's about, forget it. I'm a way back.

And that's the very thing Jesus is saying. Because there are people who sometimes say, well, I'm going to try Christian. I'm going to become a Christian. And they just say, well, this is it. I'm going to join up.

And after a while, they find it's not what they thought. And they say, well, I've given Christianity a try. And I'm going back. Jesus says, that's not the way you work.

That's not how it is. And let me say, it always hurts the Christian church when anyone goes back. Whether that person actually was united to Christ by faith and backslides.

[16:34] Because remember, those who are truly united to Christ cannot ultimately be lost, even although they may backslide. But those who were never truly united to Christ by faith and begin to go back, or go back, it always hurts the Christian church when one who walked with them goes back.

Always. Always. There's always a pain in it. Always a hurt. But then Jesus really homes in, or centers it all, in verse 27.

And he says, Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Now, by using the figure of the cross, Jesus is using a really, really graphic illustration.

Because when a person was going to be crucified, they carried their own cross. That's one of the things you had to do. The cross, the wood that you were going to be crucified on, it was part of your punishment.

You had to carry it to the place of crucifixion. And a man carrying his cross had no further plans for his life.

[17:52] He had no more control over his own life. His life was now under the authority of the person or the people who were going to put him to death.

As he walked with his cross, he had no further plans for life. That's it. It's over. I'm carrying this cross. I am under the authority of these people who are going to put me to death.

Today's my last day. My life is over. It's no longer my own. This cross is signifying to everybody, I have no more control over my own life.

And you can see what a graphic picture Jesus is using. When he takes a picture of the person with his cross, carrying his cross. Because that's really what he's saying when a person becomes a Christian.

That you are now saying, I have no further plans for my own life with regard to my own selfish ambition, with regard to my own way. It's now got to be God's way.

[18:55] What is the Lord saying? What is the Lord's way for my life? And there are times when God will call us.

It's going to be different for different people. But there will be times when God will call us to die to our own comforts, to our own ambitions, and to our own plans.

And a cross is painful. Cross is painful. We'd rather the easy life. You know, sometimes when we look at the like of this and we say, I wish this wasn't here.

I would rather the easy life. I would rather a comfortable life. I don't like the idea of conflict. I don't like the idea of struggle. I don't like the idea of dying to all the lusts and the pride and all the things that are in my own life.

I would rather give free reign to these things. The Lord says, no. It's a battle. It's a putting to death. As we say, the cross will vary from person to person.

[20 : 07] But again, we can ask. There's a lot of things we could talk. We could begin to look at various types of crosses. We won't this morning. Why the cross?

Well, there's various things about the cross. One thing is it will keep us humble. It'll keep us from becoming puffed up and self-sufficient and self-reliant. And the Lord will make sure, if you're following, that there is some form of cross or other in your life.

You may be saying to yourself, Lord, I would be a far better Christian if it weren't for this thing in my life. Take this away. But the Lord knows you wouldn't be.

The apostle Paul thought he'd be a far better Christian if only that thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, I don't know. But if only that thorn could be taken away, I would serve the Lord far better. But no. The Lord said to him, no. Three times Paul asked that it be removed. And the Lord said, no. Because the Lord knew that Paul was able to serve.

[21 : 13] That Paul's service was going to be greater with it than without it. And so we find that there will be these crosses. Which we don't want in our lives.

But the Lord has them there for a purpose. And also the cross will keep us from settling too much in this world. You know, there are times we feel like bedding down.

Ah, this world's good. You know, there are times the Christian will say that. Where everything is so comfortable and things are going well. And day by day we're saying, you know, I'm really content and happy here in this world.

And I'm not talking here about the times that the Christian is exercised and leaning upon Christ and enjoying life. That happens. And that's good. Talking here about when we lose sight of the Lord. And our devotions are almost non-existent. And our love for the Lord is distant. And our Christian, the input is minimal.

[22 : 24] But we feel so settled in the world. We've lost sight of heaven. We've lost sight of Christ. Well, my friend, this cross, the Lord is going to bring, he's going to shake things up a wee bit to remind us, you're just a pilgrim in this world.

You're just passing through. This is not your home. It's here for a while. But in the grand scale of eternity, it's only for a wee while.

Don't become too embedded down in this world. And so the cross, this is part of what the cross does. And again, the cross prepares us for the crown.

That's the way. The cross and the crown. Jesus, remember, speaking to believers who were suffering, he said, Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

Great is your reward in heaven. We're told elsewhere that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

[23 : 30] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Come after me. Come after me by following my word, by living in obedience to his word.

Come after me by following my example. You see, the Christian's life ought to be a life of good works. Jesus highlights that.

We'll look at that just as we come to conclude in a moment in the example of the salt. In other words, the Christian's life ought to bring an impact for good upon society.

If you are a believer today, you see, this is what we've got to remember. As a believer, you have a responsibility to where you are in your work, in your home, in society.

By letting the light that is Christ, which is in you, shine by your life. This is why you are here.

[24 : 31] It is to glorify God. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and so glorify my Father which is in heaven. Every Christian life ought to be displaying Christ.

That's why you're made. That's why you're here. And so Jesus is showing us the importance of Christianity and the deep commitment that is required.

But we've got to remember the other side of it, that all the time the Lord is watching over us. He's sheltering us. He's protecting us. He's delighting in us. He's delivering us. But Jesus is asking us, and he's showing us, that when he calls us, it is not as spectators but as recruits.

Jesus doesn't call us to tag along out of curiosity. He calls us to throw in our lot with himself.

Remember that. The Christianity is not a spectator sport.

I shouldn't use it like that, but you know people say a spectator sport. Christianity is not a spectator thing. It is involvement. Jesus doesn't call us to just sit back and say, oh well, you know, it's possible for Christians to say, well, now that I'm a Christian, all I want is to get.

[25 : 57] My life is going to be about getting. I want the best sermons. I want the best books. I want to go to the best prayer meeting. I want the best of everything.

That's not what the Lord says. We are saved to serve. Yes, by all means, let us seek for the best ways.

Because when we get the best, it's in order to build us up. But it is to build us up in order to serve. To be involved. And every one of us has to be involved wherever we're at.

Serving the Lord. That doesn't mean that we've got to serve the Lord in what might be looked upon with regard to the church. As simply in the building of the church.

The church of Jesus Christ, remember, is made up of the individuals. You serve the Lord where you are. Whether it's in your place of work. In your home.

[27 : 00] You might be the only Christian in your home. What a place of service that is. Remember Legion. He wanted to go with Jesus after he was converted. He wanted to stay near Jesus.

And to feed on Jesus. And Jesus said, no. Legion. Time to go home. That's your field of service. Go back home. You've got a whole mission field there.

It was a tough one. That's the toughest place of all. Is to go home. And to work there. And to serve.

Because that's where people know you the best. They know all your flaws. And all your failings.

But that's where the Lord sends us. Wherever we are. We are the church. People say, what's the church doing? We put the question back and say, well, what are you doing?

That's always got to be the question. And then finally, we see that Jesus finishes off by likening the disciple to salt.

[28 : 01] And very simply, salt is of value. As long as it retains its saltiness. And salt preserves. It combats deterioration.

And salt adds flavor. And that's really what the Christian should be doing. Acting as a preservative. Acting as one who flavors society.

And you look back. And I'm sure we can look at Christians today. But we often look back. And I often think of so many. Of those who were eminent Christians amongst us.

And who have gone. And you know this. It's often when they go, you realize just what an impact they had. They flavored communities.

They flavored the home. There was something beautiful about them. We appreciated them when they were here. But it was often after they had gone that you realize.

[28 : 59] What an impact they were having. And it's true of so many. You think of the Christians. And I think of it even in the time since I've been here.

And all the deaths. And it's one of the hardest things where you're involved in. But you're just moving on and moving on. But every one of them. They had their impact.

Because there was something beautiful about their character. And we're always the poorer when they're gone. You feel it. I always feel it. And we do.

And that's the very thing that Jesus is saying. The Christian is salt. The Christian flavor. The Christian preserves. A wonderful thing.

But then the Lord brings it. And he homes it into ourselves. And he says, are we acting as salt? You see, if we become. Really, I suppose to a certain extent.

[29 : 58] That if we become so diluted with the world. With worldliness. That our Christian impact can go. Our effectiveness can go.

And notice what happens to the worthless salt. It's thrown away. That's what happens. Worthless salt is thrown away. And Jesus says, he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

In other words, Jesus is saying, take hold of what I am saying. Abandoning discipleship has serious consequences.

If we lose our discipleship. We will be thrown away. That's what Jesus is saying. We're of no value. We're of no worth.

Well, may we seek to be salt. Where we are. And the greatest way we can be salt. Is by becoming more and more like Jesus. Today we may feel so unlike him.

[31 : 01] But let us remember that his grace is able to transform. And just as we mentioned in all these lives. That lives of great character.

And great worth. And great value. Lives that impacted. Lives of light. And lives that were salt. We ask that and pray that our lives may have the same impact.

And create the same impression. For good. And in that way. The Lord is being glorified. Let us pray.
Oh Lord our God.

We pray. That our desire will be. To be salt and to be light. We pray that we may. In recognizing the high cost of discipleship.

Be prepared to cast in our lot with Christ. Because this is the great way. To walk through this world. We pray to forgive us our sin.

[32 : 01] Forgive us Lord for when we are not Christ like. In what we say. And in what we do. Help us to follow thee with all our heart. And forgive us all our sin we pray.

In Jesus name we ask it. Amen.