

# Luke 14:25-35

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening, friends. We have before us this evening a difficult passage, so I'd like to invoke the Lord's help before we begin.

Let's pray. Lord, I do pray that you would speak to us from your word and that you would clarify our confusions and that you would lead us into a deeper love of you through your words this evening. And I pray that you do with me the meditation of my heart and the words of my mouth would be acceptable to you. In the name of Jesus, I pray these things. Amen. Amen. How's it?

Yeah. Hi, everybody. So, our passage this evening is Luke 14, verse 25 to 32.

You can turn there with me if you would. Luke 14, verses 25 through 32. When I was a little boy and then in my teenage years as well, I had this vivid memory of living in this old sort of farmhouse.

[ 1 : 38 ] I moved from the city to a farmhouse. And no matter where we lived, every time I would go to bed at night, I remember one last thing. This was my dad walking around the house to lock all of the doors.

And he would rattle every single door. And when I was young enough, I thought this was just the most heroically brave thing I could possibly imagine. This man not only locked up our house, but even locked up his office, which was in the dark out there.

He went out every single night and locked up all of the doors. And then he'd come back in. And I understood this to be something like the epitome of fatherliness.

To go around and make sure all of the entrances by which somebody could come in undesired were closed and secured. This to me was a down payment of my dad's love for his family and his desire that we'd be secure.

He went around and he looked at all of the vulnerabilities in the house and secured them. The passage before us tonight is Jesus telling us to count the cost of following him.

[ 2 : 55 ] And I think another way of asking this question or thinking about this question of the cost of following Jesus is asking this question of, where are the vulnerabilities in our souls?

Those things that we are particularly tempted toward? Where are the dangers that we ought to be on guard against? Because from those sides, danger might come.

What are the things that we would be willing to trade Christ for? This is the question I want to have in the back of our minds as we read this text. Luke 14, verse 25 through 33.

Now great crowds accompanied him. And he, Jesus, 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 first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

[ 4 : 08 ] Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and 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.

As I said, these are hard words. I think the main point of this passage is that we are to count the cost of following Jesus. So here's how I think this passage is working, just a broad overview.

Jesus has got, notice, great crowds with him, and he says harsh words to great crowds. He's not interested only in getting a large audience.

[ 5 : 14 ] He's interested in people following him for the right reasons and understanding what it will cost them. So great crowds accompany him, and he turns and says 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.

The first thing, hate your family. We'll come back to that. Second thing, take up your cross and follow me. I think these two things are the things that are necessary for following Christ. And the rest of the passage is examples. So the foundation, the tower, is about preparing yourself beforehand before you begin a task.

And the going to war against the other king is about preparing yourself beforehand before you go and undo a task. It's about making sure you're ready to do the thing you're going to commit to doing.

And I think one of the ways we can judge our hearts and see if we're willing to pay the price of following Christ is to ask, what's the price we would pay to abandon him?

[ 6 : 25 ] Where are we most tempted to abandon him? Temptation. Temptation comes in all shapes and sizes and not every temptation is effective on every person.

So I'll ask you the question, which door of your soul is the one through which the danger would come? The danger being forsaking Christ.

What's that temptation? I think Jesus has an idea here of two big categories of temptations. Reasons we would be inclined to abandon and not follow Christ.

I want to look at those two broad categories, say what it is that we have to give up in order to follow him, and then say how we can use these categories of things actually to wing our way toward God, to encourage us in our following of him.

Okay? So, I suggest there are two main things that Jesus says gets in the way of our following him. Pleasures and pains. The pleasures of life, I think, are represented by the things Jesus tells us to hate.

[ 7 : 37 ] Look at the things he tells us. Mother and father, wife, children, even your own life. The natural question is, what's wrong with these things? And the correct response is, nothing's wrong with them.

They're good things. They're joys. They are pleasures. But then why does Jesus tell us to hate them? I think it's because this is one direction from which danger might come.

We might be tempted to enjoy these pleasures more than we enjoy Christ. Look also at the parable above ours here. Beginning in verse 15 there, you see this parable of a man who invites his friends to a banquet.

And all of his friends give reasons why they can't come to this banquet. They say, oh, I've taken a wife and I can't do it. Oh, I have to do some business ventures and I can't do it. Again, these are all good things.

So the question is, what's Jesus got against mother and father and brother and sister and children? I think he's aware that one of the dangers that would incline us away from following him is our pleasures.

[ 8 : 49 ] And the second category of things comes in the verse right afterwards. Take up your cross and follow me. If anyone's not willing to take up his cross, he can't follow me.

Now, this phrase, take up your cross, has become a relatively common one. When we hear this phrase, take up your cross, we realize that we're talking in religious vocabulary.

And I want to sort of get away from that idea a little bit. I want to give you a sense of just how strange this might sound to Jesus's hearers. Remember when Jesus said these words, he wasn't crucified yet.

The cross didn't have any religious significance whatsoever. So read it like this. If anyone is not willing to take up, to strap himself into an electric chair, he won't follow me.

If any man's not willing to blindfold himself in front of a firing squad, he can't follow me. If anyone's not willing to kneel down on the executioner's block before a person with an enormous sword is going to decapitate you, he's not ready to follow me.

[ 9 : 57 ] These are the sort of things that Jesus says are necessary for following him. I think what's going on here is Jesus is aware that one of the dangers from the other side is the danger of pains.

The dangers of pleasures and the dangers of pains. These, I think, are the two broad categories that Jesus sees as being able to turn our affections away from him.

What does it mean to hate these good things and to be willing to take up these bad things? Here's what I think it means.

The life of following Jesus means that nothing else can evermore hold our highest allegiance. Nothing.

Not family, not country, not political party, not even allegiance to our own life. Nothing. And the corollary, the implication of that is we cannot have lives designed to flee at all costs from pain.

[ 11 : 08 ] We cannot have lives that seek only the good of other allegiances and we cannot have lives that flee away from pain.

If anyone would not take up his cross, he cannot be my disciple. If anyone does not hate his family, he cannot be my disciple. We have the problem of pleasures and the problem of pain.

Jesus tells us that we are to count the cost of these things. And so what I want to do for the rest of our time together is ask the question, how can we use pleasures and pains in such a way that they do not steer us away from God, but steer us toward God?

That's the question I want to spend the rest of our time together on. So, the questions of pleasures. Jesus says, hate your mother and father and brother and sister, wife, children, even his own life.

What does this mean? This is certainly the most difficult passage in our verse, in our passage for tonight. Here's what I don't think it means. I don't think it means really hating our family members.

[ 12 : 28 ] Which is to say, I don't think it means what it pretty clearly seems to mean. Why do I not think it means that? Well, for the simple reason that it doesn't make a lot of sense of other parts of the Bible.

If we say that the part, the essential feature of being a Christian is that we hate our family members, there's a lot of the Bible that seems not to make any sense anymore. For example, Jesus says, the first commandment of the law, the most important one, love the Lord your God.

The second one, love your neighbor as yourself. Well, if we are to hate our neighbors, hate our family, we can no longer obey that second commandment. This introduces all kinds of strangeness if we interpret this passage as literally saying that we ought to hate our family.

Or again, in the book of 1 John, where we learn that love, not hate, is the defining feature of the Christian. John says, Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. That seems to fly in the face of what's being said here. We have a straightforward contradiction and so what we have to do in order to make sense of this contradiction is follow an old rule in scriptural interpretation.

[ 13 : 53 ] Almost as old as the Bible itself and the rule is this. Christians interpret the difficult pieces of scripture in light of the easy pieces of scripture.

It's a nice rule. It goes back as old as the church fathers. They recognize there are some ambiguities and difficulties in the text and what we're to do is we're supposed to interpret those difficulties through the lens of the easier texts.

I think doing that with this passage ends us up with this interpretation. We ought to be so committed in our love for Jesus that in comparison the love of family and indeed of our own lives looks like hatred.

hatred. We ought to be so in love with Jesus that in comparison all of our other loves look like hatreds.

It's a comparative claim that he's making here. Some examples of this. How do you love Jesus in a way that makes your love of family look like hatred?

[ 15 : 07 ] A big one I can think of is converting away from a religion that has been in your family for decades and is against Christ. Some of you may have stories or your parents may have stories like this.

I know mine do. When my parents became Christians and went in their excitement to tell their parents their parents first response was what's wrong with the way I raised you?

They thought they were hated by my parents because my parents knew love for Jesus. Now my grandparents never tried to kill my parents.

In some parts of the world that's precisely what happens when you abandon the family's religion.

Your love for Christ makes your other loves look like hatreds. Or what does it mean to love Christ so much that it looks like your own life is hated?

How about martyrdom? the idea that I will not abandon Christ even if it costs me my own life. Again so many examples of ways that our love for Christ reorients our other loves.

[ 16 : 25 ] You see I don't think this text means that we're supposed to love our families less than we do. I think this means we're supposed to love our families and our own lives better than we do. And how does a Christian do this?

The Christian loves his own life and the lives of the people around him by ordering his loves rightly. Ordering your loves rightly.

Here's an easy example of this. It's good to eat a hamburger. It is also good to save a drowning child.

but it's not good to eat a hamburger while the child is drowning. Right? So there are two good things that you ought to love doing but they ought to be ordered in a particular way.

Such that if you have to pick one of them don't pick the hamburger over the drowning child. Now you're not going to forget this. Alright. Here I think is what Jesus is trying to tell us.

[ 17 : 26 ] That the love for God orders the rest of our loves. That the love of our family or indeed of our own lives over him results in idolatry.

And all our other loves will end up being skewed in service of our highest love. If you love your career more than anything else then everything you have will be skewed in the direction of career advancement.

And if you love money more than anything else then everything in your life will be skewed in terms of how you can get more money. So on for fame and so on for your own safety for good health.

Notice this. This is the way we work. We love so many different things but that thing we put in our position of highest love has a tendency to attract all of our other loves to it.

There's an implication for what we put at our highest love on the rest of our loves. perhaps you might know a woman or a man a child or a parent who loves their child more than anything else in the world.

[ 18 : 44 ] And the result is that that child is not loved well that child is turned into an idol. Or again a person who loves their spouse more than anything else in the world is turned into an idol.

You can't see it properly. You can't relate to it well. You turn it into an idol. But the claim of Jesus here is that when we put God in that position of our first love then that's the only right way to order all of the rest of our loves.

God when we love God we love everything for God's sake. So we love our wife and husband and children and parents, brothers and sisters, even our own lives for the sake of loving God.

What might this mean? Well, it means that we ought to love everything in our life in so far as it helps us love God and in such a way as to help them love God.

There is plenty of confusion in the world about what love is. And the dominant idea seems to be something like leaving people alone to do whatever they want.

[ 20 : 11 ] That's just not the Christian idea of love. The Christian idea of love is to love everyone around us in such a way that their highest joy would be found in God.

So what does it mean to love your neighbor or your mother or your sister or your brother or your child? Well, it means to love them in such a way as to always point them to God.

Not to allow them to indulge in destructive behaviors, behaviors, but rather to point them toward the thing that will truly make them happy. Sometimes this will look like hatred, as it does when a parent pulls their child's hand away from the stove, intervening in their desires, not allowing them to do what they want to do.

Surely you must hate a person like that. No, you love a person. And so you love them by pointing them to the highest good. When the loves of the Christian are ordered properly, the Christian then goes out to try to help all other fellow Christians order their loves properly.

So the way we use the pleasures of other people is we use people in such a way that we might help them on their way to God.

[ 21 : 40 ] consider some things that the writer of Hebrews says. The writer of Hebrews says, let us consider how to stir one up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging each other all the more as you see the day drawing near.

We love each other not by forgetting about each other and letting each other do whatever we desire, but rather by stirring each other up to love and good works.

Or consider again the words of C.S. Lewis in a sermon called *The Weight of Glory*, which I recommend to you if you've never read it. He says this, it is a serious thing to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to will one day be a creature which if you saw it now you would be strongly tempted to worship or else it would be a horror and a corruption such as you now meet if at all only in a nightmare and all day long we in some degree are helping each other to one or other of these destinations.

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. You have never talked to a mere mortal and every interaction with every person you meet is helping them become a lover of God or a lover of themselves.

And Jesus says counting the cost of following him means loving everything in this world in such a way that we help that thing move toward God that person move toward God that we love even our own selves only as we move ourselves toward God.

[ 23 : 31 ] This is the way we use the pleasures around us. We use them to wing us on our way up to God. We cannot follow Jesus and make the pleasures of this world into idols.

We can follow Jesus and make the pleasures of this world signposts that point to his goodness.

There's a temptation I think among some of loving the world too much.

It's a good temptation. When you love the world too much, that's called idolatry. Or if you love the world wrongly, it's called idolatry. But if you look at the words of Jesus in the Gospels, it seems like he actually loves this world.

He's come to redeem it, that he loves it, that he sees that there are good things in it, that he desires to save. If we can see each other and the things of this world through his eyes, to see those things as they're good in themselves, that is the way we can love each other and the things of this world in such a way as to encourage us on our way to God.

So, the use to be made of pleasures in following the Lord is not to make them into idols, but to use them as sign posts that point to the beauty of God.

[ 25 : 04 ] To understand ourselves as fellow pilgrims on the way moving up to heaven, we ought to encourage each other on our way there. That's the use to be made of pains.

What about the use to be made of pleasures? What about the use to be made of pains? We'll see there in verse 27, Jesus says, whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

whoever does not willingly accept some pains in this world cannot be my disciple. Indeed, the person who is not willing to lay down his or her very life cannot be my disciple.

So pain is normal for the life of a Christian. Which means if you have organized your life in such a way as to avoid as strongly as possible any possible pains, you're going to have difficulty following the Lord.

Because he says taking up crosses and following him is just part of the deal. So then if we can't flee from pain at any cost, how do we use pains?

[ 26 : 22 ] How do we use pains in our life of following Christ? we should see them I think as bearing the cross.

The phrase that Jesus uses here bearing the cross and following me. There's religious meaning in this now. It wasn't clear what this meant when he first said it.

But what we know after this story is that Christ himself came to bear the cross. was that suffering meaningless?

Absolutely not. But through that suffering God was redeeming the entire world. And now he says bear your cross as well.

What he does by saying that your pains are a cross is he redeems them and gives them meaning. Now our suffering in the way of following Jesus is not just unfortunate.

[ 27 : 29 ] It's not just frustrating. It's redemptive. It means something. We are on our way to glory following in the footsteps of Christ.

Our master has borne a cross and we must too bear crosses. Think about the way Paul talks about this. His own pains going around in his missionary endeavors.

To the Colossians he says this. I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is the church.

I am filling up the afflictions of Christ. The suffering that Christ suffered I am participating in that suffering in order to bring the church to its fullness.

Paul talks like this all the time. In Philippians he says I desire to depart and be with Christ but I know that to stay here and labor is going to be difficult but I'll do it.

[ 28 : 37 ] I'm going to labor painfully with you not because pain is good in itself not because my pain is meaningless because I can share in the sufferings of Christ.

This suffering with Christ is what we picture when we baptize people. We are buried with Christ and we are raised again with Christ.

This is the mark of initiation into the people of God. It's so unavoidably a part of the Christian life that it's the drama we play out when we welcome a new person into the life of the church.

When a person becomes a believer and enters into the church we baptize them. We tell them guess what death and resurrection is part of the deal. You don't get in without death and resurrection.

Both Jesus' and our own. But notice what this does with our sufferings. It means we embrace them. Not because we're masochists.

[ 29 : 42 ] Not because we love suffering. Because we realize that our sufferings are bearing crosses. There's redemption happening. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the pangs of this world are not the pangs of death, but the pangs of birth.

The sort of pains that you willingly undertake because new life comes out of them. pangs of following Christ means there will be pleasures and pains.

The pleasures can distract us or they can help us on our way up to loving him. The pains can drive us away from him or they can be redeemed by him.

The use to be made of pleasures and pains if we're not going to allow them to distract us from following him. The use of pleasures and pains is the same.

We offer our pleasures up to God as worship. We offer our pains up to God as participating in his sufferings.

[ 30 : 53 ] Think about this. Think of a little pure joy you've experienced recently. For me it was eating ice cream at this new ice cream store.

There's a way of making that ice cream into an idol. There is. Or there's a way of making that ice cream into an occasion for worship.

There's a way of making the sunshine outside an occasion for worship. There's a way to make the beauty of stained glass windows into occasions for worship.

God is lavishing his joy upon us through the thousands of pleasures we experience each day that we don't even realize. They're occasions for our worship.

And God is also doing something in every one of the pains that we experience as we follow him. he's doing something.

[ 32 : 00 ] Our pain is not meaningless to him. Listen to the way Paul talks in Galatians 2. He says, I've been crucified with Christ.

Stop. I've been crucified with Christ. I've been killed by the firing squad with Christ. I've been lethally injected with Christ.

I've been beheaded with Christ. I've been electric chaired with Christ. Think of the language he's using here. It's vivid. I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Jesus says that the way to follow him is to give up the things that we have. To willingly embrace pain and to find that by giving up the things that we have we receive them all back again.

[ 33 : 10 ] And that by willingly embracing pain we find that pain not to be mere meaningless suffering but to be working out redemption for us.

If we would flee away from using pleasure like this or flee away from using pain like this we can't be followers of Christ. But what we find in following Christ is that he has won for us all of the pleasures we could ever need.

Do you remember the story of Abraham and Isaac? Abraham's asked to sacrifice Isaac shows that he's willing to go ahead and do it.

And what happens afterwards stunningly he receives Isaac back again. All of the things he was willing to sacrifice because God commanded him to he received back again.

If any man loses his life for my sake he will gain it. This is what Jesus says. How do we know this is true?

[ 34 : 21 ] How do we know that our pleasures are redeemed and our pains are redeemed? We know them because we are following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Jesus suffered these pains to bring us to glory. Jesus bore his cross to take us into the kingdom. Consider some of these things that he says about our pleasures. And our pains. He says this in Luke 12:13 Fear not little flock.

It is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Notice that. It's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. What follows afterwards?

Therefore sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old. With a treasure in the heavens that does not fail where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

[ 35 : 22 ] Do you see? The father wants to give you the kingdom. Therefore sell the junk you have and store up your treasures in heaven. Seek out for yourselves true pleasures.

Or again in John 1:14 he says that you may have life and life to the fullest. Life abundantly. Life full of ice cream and sunshine.

He did this he purchased these gifts for us by enduring the pains of the cross and purchasing for us every good pleasure.

In Ephesians 4 Paul says when Christ ascended on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. Like a conquering general after he returned from battle he brought all this loot with him and he gives it out to his people lavishly but the cross comes before the crown and those who would follow him would take up their cross knowing that after death follows resurrection and the way we use our pleasures and pains now is a foretaste of that resurrection when you look into the face of one who loves you when you eat ice cream cone you are tasting the very very smallest little pleasure of heaven and when you suffer for

Christ's sake you get a sense of the new life that will come once these pangs of birth are completed everything in your life in the service of Christ has meaning your pleasures and your pains are doing something because Christ has won that for us Christ has won that our pains would not be foretastes of hell Christ has won for you the fact that your heart break is not a foretaste of hell that your bad health is not a foretaste of hell that the sin that so easily besets you is not a foretaste of hell those pains are going to end and he has purchased for you all of your pleasures are foretastes of heaven this is the use we made of pleasures and pains in the way of following

[ 38 : 36 ] Jesus if we would seek not to have these pains we will not have the redemption that comes afterwards if we would seek to have pleasures first we will not finally have pleasures at all but rather by organizing our loves putting Christ at the top everything else falls into place now in our passage Jesus doesn't give us an incentive for why we ought to do this he doesn't make it clear why we ought to follow him in this way take up our electric chair and follow him he just doesn't say that's lived out in his life and the chapters to come Jesus will show that he loves us by going to the cross and therefore when we love Christ more than anything else we love the one who loves us more than anything else he has given us ample reason to love him through the death and resurrection that he endured through the joy that he won for us meditate on these things little flock do not worry the father desires to give you the kingdom what are these pennies compared to that and so be willing friends by meditating upon the beauty of

Christ to love him more than pleasures to love him in such a way that you will endure pains because he has gone before us in enduring these pains and winning for us these pleasures let's pray together lord i pray that as we think of you and meditate on the sacrifice that you made for us we would come to see the rest of these things in life as cheap in comparison to you that once we give them up for you and you give them back to us we can use every one of them as occasions for worship we thank you that you loved us and gave yourself for us that you took up your cross so that our sufferings will now become not meaningless but cross shaped and we know from your example that after the cross comes the resurrection so as we endure sufferings and enjoy pleasures we look forward to that day when pleasure will be forever more and every tear will be wiped away we pray come

Lord Jesus in his name we pray amen to up to