

August 18, 2019  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Luke  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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## THE COST FOR FOLLOWING JESUS Luke 14:25-35

I recently read a news article that claims Mike Tyson, the former heavy-weight boxing champion, spends \$40,000 each month on marijuana he smokes. I'm pretty sure that most people, even in America, would consider that to be an extreme waste. Why does he do that? Probably because he is addicted to a habit that brings him short-lived pleasure. Of course, a man who reached a net worth of \$300 million at the peak of his career can afford to pay a high price to enjoy a little pleasure, right? Yes, but currently, this man who once accrued \$300 million is worth only about \$3 million. He has paid a price for pleasure.

The irony is that Mike Tyson is also the man who paid a steep price, made a lot of sacrifices, in order to achieve the goal of becoming the best heavy-weight boxer in the world. A professional boxer must maintain a very strict diet, must get plenty of exercise, must avoid habit-forming pleasures, and must work out about five hours a day, five days a week. That is a high price to pay. But if we had known it would gain us \$300 million, even you and I might have been willing to try it.

Paying a high price to walk in fellowship with Christ is not in vogue at the moment in our culture. Enjoying a religious experience at my convenience is a much more popular market these days. That is why church advertisements sound a lot like Broadway or theme parks. Some church websites advertise, "Come to our church and have a blast." Honestly, many churches appeal to a consumer's baser desires. Try to imagine how popular our church would be if our website promised, "Come to Community and learn why you must die to self and take up a cross of shame in order to have fellowship with

Christ." If we got any hits on the webpage it would only be from curious people who would find it incredulous that we would make such a statement.

But that is the invitation from Christ. It makes no sense to people. Why would anyone want to make a huge sacrifice to be in fellowship with Christ when they can satisfy religious requirements by participating in fun religious experiences? Here is the irony. Having fun times in religion in this life is tantamount to rejecting the Master's invitation to dine at His banquet for eternity. Conversely, walking in fellowship with Jesus while carrying the cross of identification with Him in this life is to accept the Master's invitation to the eternal banquet in heaven. Which do you prefer? Being branded and avoided because you are a Christ-follower now, but enjoying eternal blessing? Or enjoying acceptance and pleasure now, but suffering loss for eternity?

### The Call for Commitment (vv.25-27).

Jesus' call for commitment flows out of the context. It seems likely that it flows from the important question asked way back in 13:23, "Lord will those who are saved be few?" Part of Jesus' answer to the question is that only the few who agonize to enter through the narrow door will be saved. (13:24). Also, part of the answer to the question is that being familiar with Jesus, eating and drinking in His presence, does not qualify a person for entrance into the kingdom of God (13:26-27). And it is also true that God invites many to sit down in the kingdom with King Jesus, but they reject the invitation (14:16-21). And those who do enter, those who are invited and drawn by the Master to the banquet, are the unexpected invitees (14:22-24).

Against that backdrop, great crowds gathered once again. Great crowds required a challenge. *Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them (v.25).* It is likely that Jesus was still making His way toward Jerusalem to lay down His life as the payment for sin. And still, even at this point in His ministry, great crowds gathered around.

Most of the people were there for the wrong reasons. Most of the people gathered for selfish reasons. They needed physical healing.

They needed emotional healing. They wanted to feel better about themselves. They wanted free food. They were not much different than many of the people who throng to churches and follow religious leaders today. Many men and women have a lot of emotional baggage from difficult pasts. Many people are aware of sin in their lives and want to feel less guilty. Many are addicted to sinful habits and want release. Many are superstitious enough to believe that if they take up religion (kind of like following Jesus), Jesus will reward them with health, wealth, and prosperity.

The agonizing truth about these matters is that there are plenty of charlatans and false teachers who make a good living telling people these lies. Mark this well! If you think you are chasing Jesus for what you can get out of the relationship, you are not going through the narrow door. If that describes you, you need this challenge from Jesus.

The challenge explains why you cannot be a follower of Jesus. The challenge requires that you must commit to Jesus above all else. *“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”* (v.26). In no way did Jesus recommend in this challenge that we dishonor our parents, despise our spouse, children, or siblings. That would be a direct contradiction to the law of God which Jesus came to bring to completion. Nor did Jesus recommend that we join a monastery, eat bad food, and sleep on beds of nails in order to show hatred for ourselves.

Jesus used a common Semitic comparison by which love and preference would be shown for one over another. For example, when God said that He loved Jacob but hated Esau, He did not mean that he had animosity for Esau but that He preferred Jacob over his brother. Likewise, the same Hebrew word that is translated *hated* is used to describe how Leah was unloved by Jacob. It doesn't mean that Jacob despised her, but that he preferred Rachel to her.

Therefore, Jesus taught that our preference for God supercedes all family relationships (as well as all other relationships). How does that incredible preference for God work out in your life? Given the conflict, would you rather please God or your family or your friends? Given the choice, would you rather spend time with God or a friend?

Given two opportunities, would you rather spend time praising God with God's people or spend time hanging out with unsaved people. And surely someone will argue that God desires for us to impact the unsaved, God desires for us to spend time with family, and God expects us to live life in this world. Yes, I am not denying those needs. But, your argument is causing your guilt to wave a red flag to be noticed.

Not only must our relationship with Christ supercede all other relationships, but we must pick up the cross and follow after Him. *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple* (v.27).

This is the second time Luke recorded Jesus' statement about cross bearing. In chapter nine Luke recorded, *And he said to all, “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 will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels”* (Luke 9:23-26).

The theme in that statement is the need for us to deny the idol of self. Added to that is the need to admit and live out the “life is not about me” attitude (v.23). That is so difficult because we naturally desire to please and care for self. But the miracle of regeneration, entering through the narrow door, strips us of that slavish desire. The new rule of life according to God is, *Therefore, never let sin rule your physical body so that you obey its desires. Never offer any part of your body to sin's power. No part of your body should ever be used to do any ungodly thing. Instead, offer yourselves to God as people who have come back from death and are now alive. Offer all the parts of your body to God. Use them to do everything that God approves of. Certainly, sin shouldn't have power over you because you're not controlled by laws, but by God's favor* (Romans 6:12-14 GWV).

Jesus pointed out in the Luke 9 passage that attempting to salvage a pleasant, easy, prosperous life is to lose (v.24). The only right attitude (which flows out into action) is taking up your cross (v.23). *Your cross* is not your “hardships” or “trials” of life. **Your** cross is your identity with the shame of Christ's crucifixion. When

you follow Christ, you make His cross your cross. You become identified with the shame sinners heaped upon the Perfect Son of God.

That is why being ashamed of Christ and the Bible principles is proof that you have no relationship with Christ. Jesus said in Luke 9:26, *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

And that is why cross-bearing is the essential characteristic of Jesus-following. Followers of Christ develop convictions against sins that are clearly identified in the Bible and do not wish to be characterized by them. What are Bible sins? A brief example would be a list that contains, lust, sensuality, pride, arrogance, selfishness, greed, covetousness, envy, jealousy, anger, losing your temper, vengeance (the desire to get even), and malice (the desire to hurt). Too often those are considered acceptable sins to professing Christians. Such is not God's opinion.

Also, followers of Christ develop personal preferences based on Bible principles. Preferences are different than convictions based on direct statements from the Bible. We do not expect others to hold our preferences. But we are comfortable that our preferences reinforce what we have learned in our relationship with Christ.

And that is why the apostles (save Judas) did not fit in their world. And that is why the early Christians were persecuted and hounded to death for the first 300 years of the Church's history. And that is why we pray for persecuted Christians in other nations where it is very costly to follow Jesus. And that is why there are multiplied thousands of Americans who claim to be Christians, but who are no different than their peers who do not, and who pay no cost at all for supposedly following Jesus.

If you are really not following Jesus, you don't need to worry about the cost. If you are content to be just religious, living in the South costs you nothing. Imagine a fellow who goes to the gym three times a week and lifts weights and holds to the mantra, "No pain, no gain." He probably looks like he has some physical gain. He goes to work, and at break time is talking to his co-workers about his practice. One of his co-workers is a gangly, puny sort of fellow who retorts, "Ha, I lift weights, experience no pain, and don't even break

a sweat." So, in response, maybe the exercise guy invites the puny guy to the gym to prove his point. Mr. Puny shows up, puts ten pounds on the barbell and proves his point. He doesn't lift weights. He just pretends. And it shows. And maybe you don't really follow Jesus. You just pretend. And it shows.

### **Illustrations of Contemplating Commitment (vv.28-32).**

Jesus gave two illustrations that speak to the need to carefully weigh the cost of taking up your cross. First is the story about the importance of counting the cost of building before committing to the project. The illustration is self-explanatory. *"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? 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'"* (vv.28-30).

The application of the illustration is what should concern us. A partially completed building project shouts "Incompetence." It might be true that there were extenuating circumstances like a death or some other tragedy. But that is not the story Jesus told. Here the partially completed building project testified to careless planning, uncertain requirements. So, too, when a person responds to the gospel message with enthusiasm but does not make a commitment, it reflects poorly on the Lord's work in that person's life. Is Christ not able to keep His people on board? He always does. Those who fall off the wagon were really never on the wagon.

In the second illustration, Jesus told His listeners to count the cost of war before committing. The illustration is again self-evident. *Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace* (vv.31-32).

The application teaches that going to war knowing you can't win is foolish. And making a decision to follow Christ without depending wholly on Christ is foolish. There is no partial salvation even as there is no partial dying to self.

## Conclusion of the Matter (vv.33-35).

Ultimately, the lesson that Jesus teaches us here is that only death is acceptable if we are going to follow Him. He said, “*So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple*” (v.33). To renounce is to adopt an attitude against yourself. The description, *any one of you*, means that there is no exception to this rule. The only way to be Christ’s follower is to adopt this attitude.

To renounce is to send away, forsake, take leave of. The object of that renouncing is *all that he has*. Again Jesus is not advocating that we take a vow of poverty. This is to adopt an attitude that when I become a follower of Christ, I carefully count the cost, which is—I turn everything over to Him. In reality, we are never truly the final owner of all the stuff we collect because we can’t take it with us. But when I come to embrace Christ by faith, I consciously admit that I am no longer my own, and all that I have is not my own either. All that we have must be turned over to Christ to accomplish His will in His work.

The practical application of this truth means that because we are followers of Christ, all of our possessions, our time, our talents, our energies belong to Him. Therefore, we will use our lives to help others come to know Christ and become like Christ. That is how we bring glory to Christ. It is as practical as using your car to take someone to hear the Bible preached.

This is what “crucified with Christ” means. Paul wrote the example to us Christians, *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 (Galatians 2:20)*. To reckon myself crucified with Christ means that I do what the rich young ruler could not do. I take my hands off from everything that I think I own. Crucified people have to do that. It’s hard to hang on to things when you are being crucified. Having let go of stuff, now I live according to the dictates of faith Christ gives me. I had a professor in Grad School who defined repentance like this: To repent is to lay down my arms of rebellion against God and take up His case against myself. Have you done that?

Our “saltiness” proves our claim or disproves it. Jesus taught that salt is good, which is not to contradict the conclusion of medical doctors. Jesus said, “*Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?*” (v.34). Salt was often used as a preservative in the days before refrigeration. But sometimes the salt that was gathered at the Dead Sea would be mixed with other chemicals so that it would soon lose its saltiness.

Salt that is not salty is useless. Jesus said, “*It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away*” (v.35a). “Saltless” salt had no value to be a preservative. It had no value for fertilizing plants. It did not even contribute to the compost pile. It was thrown on pathways to be walked on.

So what is the conclusion of it all? If you have ears, listen. “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” (v.35b). God gives ears to hear truth. When we are content to be offensive, sinful toward God, we hear words but the truth does not register with us. When we long to hear God speak, He speaks truth to us through the Holy Spirit. Thereby we learn important spiritual truths from God.

Here is the important spiritual truth. If we are truly followers of Christ, we will be salty. Our love for Christ will have a preserving effect against the impact of sin. The preserving effect will be for our own benefit. It will also benefit our families and even our circle of influence such as people in our church, work, and other places. And our preserving from sin “saltiness” will be for the benefit of culture at large as Christian saltiness is compounded by numbers.

Furthermore, the picture of salt teaches that our love for Christ will have a purifying, stinging effect as it reacts against sin. People often react against that stinging, purifying effect. Our love for Christ will have a positive, tasteful effect in the lives of others. That is the lesson taught in the statement, *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person (Colossians 4:6)*.

If we are not followers of Christ, there will be nothing unique about our lives. The attitudes, actions, desires of the unsaved, non-followers of Christ will be the same as our own. Because we are followers of Christ we are noticeable. It is possible that such notoriety will be the source of embarrassment, shame, uncomfortableness. But because our identity is in Christ, we graciously accept our saltiness,

even learning to appreciate our association with Christ in the minds of others.

There is such a vast difference between being religious and walking in fellowship with Christ. The Pharisees, the lawyers, the other religious leaders, as well as most of the people, were content to be religious. They didn't have a problem with not agonizing to enter through the narrow door. They didn't have a problem with rejecting the "Master's" invitation. And far too many people in our larger sphere of associations are quite content to be fairly religious. Asking for sacrifices that are commensurate with being identified with Christ is asking too much for them. But will they not desire quite strongly to be identified with Christ at the Great White Throne?