Luke 14 (Part 2): 25-35 • Counting the Cost

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Luke chapter 14 is where we are. Let's begin reading in verse 25. We're going to read down through the end of the chapter. Follow along as I read.

It says,

"Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 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. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 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.' 31 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? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

34 Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 35 It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (ESV)

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we look into these last verses of chapter 14, we're really going to need Your Holy Spirit to help us to uncover the meaning. And help us to apply that meaning also to our lives. Help us to see what You're saying to us as Christians, as followers, as children.

We want to look to You and not to our own ability to apprehend these truths. But Lord, we pray for that spiritual ability that You give us to take hold of the Word. Spiritual eyes to see, spiritual ears to hear, and that spirit filled heart that can receive. Do that work in us. We pray in Jesus name, amen

Well, you probably noticed as I was reading through these verses that they contain, at least the opening verses I read here for you today beginning there in verse 25. These contain some of the strongest statements that we've seen Jesus make about followers. About we who are, Christians, followers of Christ. And I'll be honest with you. These are some of the most troubling statements in the Bible in terms of figuring out what they mean.

And we read through these verses and it's like, Wow! Is Jesus really telling me to hate my family? Is that what He wants me to do? We read it, and we read it again.

Look with me again in verse 26. *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and..."* on and on. He says *"he cannot be my disciple."* And those are troubling and challenging things to look at here this morning.

But the first thing that you need to understand, and this is really very important to correctly interpret this passage, and frankly others that are like it, is to understand that Jesus is using hyperbole here to make His point. And hyperbole of course, is the use of radical language to try to get the attention of whoever is listening. And that is what He's using here. And He's used it before. We shouldn't be all that surprised when Jesus uses language like this to get our attention.

You'll remember there was another passage where Jesus spoke about the things that make us sin. Do you remember that? He said, if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. (Matthew 5:29-30)

No, Jesus wasn't telling you to dismember your bodies. Because you and I know that sin doesn't begin with those things anyway. It begins in the heart.

What Jesus was doing, of course, was He was using that kind of extreme language to make a point. And the point that He was making is that sometimes it takes radical measures to deal with sin in our lives. In fact, take out sometimes. It takes radical measures. And that's the point that He was making.

Well, in the same way, He's using hyperbole here to drive home the point that our devotion to Him, and our obedience to Him, must be so absolute as to appear as hatred by comparison. And basically, Jesus is communicating in, I think, pretty graphic terms, that no love in our life, no love in our life, is to

eclipse our love for Him. And if that is offensive a little bit to you, then maybe it needs to be.

And I think it's important too, that we take special note of the fact that there are two groups that he's essentially speaking about here. And mentioning first, He talks about, look again in verse 25 and 26 there. He talks about father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters. And He's talking about family. And He says... And He's telling you and I, that our love for Him needs to be greater than our love for family.

And I want you to know and understand here that Jesus is not minimizing, He is not diminishing the special bond that ought to exist between family members in any way, shape, or form. And yet He mentions family first, when He talks about His love, or your love for Him, rather, needing to be greater than those expressions of love. He mentions them because He knows that it is family that can be most demanding in our lives as much as we love these people.

And of course they make us crazy sometimes. But we love them and we're going to love them no matter what. And even when they spit in our face, and say things, and do things that are hurtful, we love them still. And because we love family so much, Jesus knows that they can place the biggest demands on our lives as it relates to our relationship with Jesus. Because we naturally want to please family members. It's just built in.

But I'll tell you something, nine times out of ten, when pressure is being brought upon an individual believer to back off from their devotion to Christ, it's going to come from family. Nine times out of ten, it's going to come from family members. And that is just the sad truth.

I received recently a rather painful note from a woman. She doesn't attend Calvary Chapel. I'll just say that. But she does listen to us online from time to time. And she wrote a note to me and I want to share a portion of it with you if I could. I'm not going to bring any names out here, obviously.

But here's what she said to me. She said, I just started going to church again a little over a year ago. My husband reluctantly goes to church each Sunday and rushes me out the door the second it ends. I recently told him I wanted to start going to Sunday school after church on Sunday. Every week he says, no, and I'm tired of arguing over it. So I stopped asking.

I found out about a women's Bible study on Wednesday mornings. I'm a stay at home mom. So I have lots of time on my hands. My husband complained and

had an attitude about it. But eventually said I could go. But I still worry about how this is impacting my daughter. She said, I'm tired of fighting with my husband. How do I grow in my relationship with God like this? It's so discouraging and I just feel like I'm constantly fighting a losing battle.

I don't know how you would respond to someone who wrote you a letter like that. But here's a gal who wants to grow in her faith after just getting back to church. And guess what the biggest hindrance is in her family? It's her husband who doesn't really want to let that... And I left a lot of things out of that note.

And I could go on and I could tell you about the woman who wrote me from India who tells me how her husband is trying to force her to attend all these pagan religious ceremonies that are going on among their friends and family so that they might be socially acceptable.

And how he constantly criticizes and badgers her for not wanting to go. She believes it'd be a compromise to her faith. He doesn't care. He wants the social push that's going to come from attending all of those things. And he's constantly on her. Constantly trying to get her to compromise her walk with the Lord.

I could tell you about the other young woman who wrote me recently. And talked to me about the fact that she was engaged to a young man. But the parents of this young man, who are not believers, were criticizing her for her Christian faith. And it just, it goes on and on.

And the question that Jesus is really asking in this passage... And I know He's not asking a question. He's coming out with a very strong statement. But the statement in itself begs the question from you and I, who is going to control your life? We call Jesus, Lord. And that means absolute ruler.

And yet our love for other people many times eclipses our love for the Lord. We don't really, truly walk out in our lives an expression of what it means to make Him Lord of all. Because we're trying to please other people.

And Jesus is basically saying, I'm not telling you not to love your family, and so forth. But if you're going to lay down this ultimate attitude... If I'm going to please this person no matter what, you're going to run into a conflict between Me and them. That's what Jesus is saying. There's going to be a conflict.

Anyway, remember I told you that there's two groups that He was talking to. There's family and then there's the really tough one. You thought that one is tough. Look what He goes on.

I'm going to read verse 26 for you once again. *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters,* (look at this part) *yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* Here we're going to make it real personal.

Again, Jesus is not telling you to hate yourself. But by comparison, He's saying, your consideration for yourself needs to be somewhere way below your consideration for Jesus, and His will, and His purpose.

And basically, what that means is, instead of you and I living a self-centered life, where my needs come first... Which is, by the way, natural. That's natural. It's a natural... It's the most natural thing in the world for me to live my life as if my needs come first.

Instead, Jesus is telling us that we are to live a Christ centered life which doesn't come natural. That comes supernaturally. That only comes through the power of the Spirit. And that's an important thing to say, through the power of the Spirit. Because if all of this talk about loving Jesus more than family and loving Jesus more than self is overwhelming to you, it should be. It's overwhelming to me too!

And you can read passages like this and you could probably even come to a place of thinking, I don't think I can do this. In fact, look at the punctuation that he puts on this in verse 27. Look at verse 27, *"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."* Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. There you feel like quitting yet. I mean, it's just...

Jesus is telling us here clearly that the life lived following Him is a life of self-sacrifice. And we struggle to read passages like this and think, what's my response? How do I respond to these kinds of incredible demands? You got to love me more than you love your family so that it's literally... So what you feel for your family is like hatred by comparison. Wow! I mean, that's about enough to knock you off your feet.

And He says, oh, and by the way, if you're not willing to take up your cross, you can't be my disciple. Wow! I guess that leaves me out, huh? I mean, you can read these verses and you can come away thinking, I don't think I can do this. And I'll tell you something. It's important that we figure out how we're going to respond so that we're not playing games with God.

How do we respond? How do you respond to statements like this? Well, let me tell you one way that won't work. Trying harder. That's not going to work. I

know because I've done it. I've tried it. Well, Lord, I'm just... I read here that I have to love You more than family. I'm just... and I don't think I've done that Lord. I'm just going to try. I'm going to try harder. And I need to take up my cross daily and follow You. And I don't think I've done that either.

I'm just... Be patient with me, Lord. I'm just going to try harder. I promise. I promise I'll try harder. That's not going to work. Trying harder doesn't get you anywhere in the kingdom of God.

The only way that I know to respond to a passage like this, that gives us such incredible and almost radical demands that come from the Lord, is to come to Him on our knees humbly saying, Lord, You know the kind of person that I am. You know me. You've watched me my entire life. And You know I can't do this. You know that I can't live up to this.

And if I'm ever going to live in a way that is pleasing to You in any way, and if I'm ever going to live a life in such a way that is sufficient for me to be called Your disciple, it's only going to happen through Your Holy Spirit operating through my life. It's the only way it's going to happen.

The only way that I can live this life is in the power of the Holy Spirit. I can't do it. It's the only way I know. It's the only way I know to approach this. Because anything else is human effort. And human effort is the essence of religiosity. Base religion where we're all trying to work our way to heaven by being a good person. Or live a good life.

I wouldn't know where to begin to start to love Jesus more than my children. I wouldn't know where to begin. Or more than my wife. I wouldn't even know where to start. Jesus, You got to make this happen in my life. You have to give me that kind of a love that doesn't denigrate my love for them. But upholds the love that I have for You as paramount. I can't do that. I don't have that kind of balance. Only in You is this even possible.

And this is something the apostle Paul dealt with in his life. And what I mean by that is, this whole issue of the call upon our lives that is greater than we could possibly bear, in terms of our own strength and ability to make it happen. And I want to show you again some powerful verses that the apostle Paul gave when he wrote to the Corinthians in his second letter. He's talking about his response from the Lord. He said that,

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (ESV)

...he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

...he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, (look at this) *for my power is made perfect in weakness."* (And so Paul went on to say,) *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I'm content* (in fact, he says) *with weaknesses,* (and things like) *insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities.*

All that kind of good stuff. And here's why, because I've realized I've come to the understanding, the realization that when I'm weak, that's when the strength of God begins to really mount up within me and show itself.

When I come to the Lord and say, I can't do this, that's when real power begins to take over. Because you see, I never could do this in and of myself. In my own man, in the flesh. Paul isn't good enough. He's not strong enough. He's not spiritual enough. And if I'm going to depend on myself, I'm never going to, I'm never going to get there.

And it's the same with you. We have to get weak before God. We have to learn how to get weak before God. Lord, I humble myself before You. You've just said things to me in the Word of God that I'm... I can't begin to attain to. Loving You more than my family. Loving You more than myself? I love myself an awful lot. And I can admit that to you guys, because I know that it's true. I think about myself a lot. I really do. I'm sorry to say it, but I do. I demand a lot of my attention.

And Jesus comes along and says, You need to renounce all that you have. In fact, He's going to go on and say that here in a moment. Or you can't be mine. And I'm like, oh.

And just as the apostle Paul understood. We need to understand that whether we're standing against the gravitational pull of our own flesh. Or whether we're standing against the opposition of a well-meaning family member who's standing in the way of what the Lord wants to do in our lives. The answer is not to simply try harder. The answer is to confess our weakness. To choose to walk in His strength.

But make no mistake about it, people. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ, is full of very difficult decisions and a lot of hard choices. Okay? And don't think that just because your life is full of difficult decisions and hard choices that maybe you made some kind of a wrong turn somewhere. Because you didn't.

This is what it is. This is life. This is what it means to walk with Jesus. It's hard. It's challenging. Right? Jesus told us it would be so. In this world you will have trouble. He also told us, to be of good cheer because He's overcome the world. (John 16:33)

But the point is we have to consider. We have to stop and consider, is this something I want to do? Because what Jesus is doing here in this passage is he's challenging you and I to count the cost of what it means to be a disciple - a follower of Jesus Christ. Right? Everyone who wants to follow Jesus needs to stop and think about it. And ask themselves the question: Is Jesus asking too much?

Isn't it interesting when just regular people are trying to garner a following, we'll tell them everything they want to hear in order to draw a crowd. Jesus chases them away, it says, when these great crowds are coming to Him. And so you understand that what's happening is that the crowds are getting bigger.

And this is the point. When Jesus steps up and says, You want to be My disciple? You want to be My follower? All right, let Me tell you what it's going to take. This is the... Here's the deal. Love me more than family so that your love for Me looks like hatred to them by comparison. Love Me more than you love yourself. So that your love for Me looks like hatred to self by comparison. Right?

And then you start thinning out the crowd a little bit. Because we can get stars in our eyes sometimes when we imagine what, I suppose, our Christian life is going to be like.

A lot of the people that were following Jesus that day when He made this statement, probably thought He was on His way to Jerusalem to take over. They probably thought He was on His way to Jerusalem, to rally a group of people around Him, to come against the Roman government, to kick them out of the country. And to establish His own throne.

And isn't that going to be fun? Let's follow Jesus! Yay! Here we go! And it's going to be great! And they don't realize He's going to Jerusalem to die. They

don't know that. If they had known, would they have turned around right then and there?

Most of His closest disciples had no idea at this point that they would give up their lives for their connection to Jesus Christ. It's our belief that only the Apostle John died a natural death. But don't think they didn't try to put him to death several times. Because it's our understanding that they did. It just never took.

But these people expected Messiah to... He was going to be the one who's going to start the big party. Let's follow Jesus. This is going to be great! And Jesus comes along and says, let Me tell you a little bit about what it takes to be My follower so that you would better understand the gravity of what that means.

Look at verse 33. I mean, He even nails it here. I've already made reference to it. He says, *"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

Boy, you look at that verse and you go, okay, what does that mean? What exactly does that mean? What it means is be ready. You want to be a follower of Jesus? Be ready. Be ready.

Be ready to leave your home and family and go wherever the Lord tells you to go. Be ready. Be ready to depend entirely on the Lord for everything. Be ready for Him to kick out every support structure from underneath you, so that you are fully and completely supported on Him and Him alone. Be ready for that.

Be ready to leave every earthly possession behind with no thought of ever getting them back. Be ready. Are you ready? What if Jesus came to you now and asked, will you go? Will you leave this behind? Will you go and follow Me? Are you ready to give away all of your money? Are you ready to pick up your cross and follow Him?

Why do we need to be ready? Because we've been called as the salt of the earth. And that's what Jesus goes on to say in these last two verses. Verse 34, He says, salt is good and all, but what do you do if it loses its taste?

I mean, He says in that case salt really isn't good for anything. And the way that you and I lose our saltiness is by being unwilling to be a true disciple - follower of Jesus. Not being willing to go where He wants us to go. Not being willing to give what He wants us to give. Not being willing to say what He wants us to say. We literally lose our saltiness if we don't really, truly make Him Lord.

And this is one of those things that we have to think through. I call him Lord all the time. I was kind of blessed when Ken started that song a cappella at the very end, I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.

I thought to myself, well, that's appropriate. I don't think Ken even knew what I was going to talk on today. That was just the Lord. I don't think... Did Ken even plan on doing that song? No. I think that was just off the top of his heart.

But we all sang it. (Pastor Paul sings) I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back. Wow. Pretty tune. Nice words. Did we mean it? Did we mean it? Are we ready? Are we ready to go? Are we ready to do. Are we ready to give?

I found a quote from an old Scottish evangelist. Most people don't even know him anymore. His name was Henry Drummond. He once said this. He said, the entrance fee into the kingdom of heaven is nothing. The annual subscription is everything. Isn't that good? I like that.

Jesus ends with these words, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* And a statement like that suggests to you and I, that there may be some who are not willing to hear.

That there are some who are not willing to accept the cost of discipleship. But, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* But he who doesn't have ears to hear, I suppose he's just going to hear what he wants to hear. And it'll just be a nice little tickle in your ear.

That brand of Christianity that you and I see from time to time. The prosperity preachers love to lay it out there for you, can be your best self? What does that even mean? Jesus says, I want you to take your best self and put it on the cross and follow Me. Oh, I don't know. That's not really a message I really signed up for. Yeah, but I think we did. We maybe just didn't know it.

When people were following Jesus, they would... He would turn around and say to them, you guys know that I have nowhere to live. Right? Foxes have holes. Birds have nests. The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. You still want to come along? (Matthew 8:20, Luke 9:58)

Yeah, I like what Drummond said, salvation is free. Discipleship is expensive. Following Jesus is expensive. Are we ready? And you know what? Nobody can answer that question except you. Am I ready? Am I ready to go where the Lord tells me to go? To do what He tells me to do?

And make no mistake about it. He's not going to tell you to abandon your family. He might ask you to leave your family. Not your spouse. You're married; not going to tell you to leave your spouse. But you may have to leave other family members to go and do what the Lord tells you to do. Are you ready?

How about your family? What if the Lord calls you somewhere and your family goes, oh, you can't go! Please don't go! Please don't go! Don't move away so far! Who are you going to follow? Who's going to control what you do, where you go, what you say? Jesus said, your love for Me must eclipse all others. Wow! Sobering, isn't it?

Let's stand and pray about it, shall we? We're going to have people up front here to pray with you. If you need prayer this morning, please take advantage of that.

Father in heaven, these are some of the most challenging Words in the Bible. Because they speak to right where we live. And right where we live Lord, is pretty comfortable, for the most part. And Lord, we hear a demand in these verses that takes us completely out of our comfort zone.

Forgive us, Lord, for we have not loved You the most. Forgive us, Lord, for we have loved self, more than we have loved You. We have followed the voice of others and the voice of self, more than we have followed Your voice. Forgive us. We have not taken up our cross and we have not followed You. Forgive us, Lord. We desire to be Your disciples.

We desire to make that title Lord, means something in terms of our willingness to go where You tell us to go. To be who You've called us to be. Father, we cannot attain to this call, it is only by Your Spirit working in us that we can live up to what You're asking of us here. What You are, in fact, demanding of us. And we believe that You've given us your Holy Spirit for that very purpose. To empower us, to enable us to live for You with a whole heart.

Thank you, Lord, for loving us enough to call us to true discipleship. Radical though it may be. We open our hearts to go forth into this world to love people, to pray for people, to care about our neighbor, to be the hands, the feet, and the mouth of Jesus, to take care of the poor, to touch the sick, to bless the hopeless. And to lead them to the light and to the life that is truly life. That which is found in Jesus Christ. It is in His name that we pray, amen. Amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday.