

Realities of True Discipleship

Luke 14:15-33

Introduction: It was supposed to cap off a meritorious career, a final voyage of a celebrated sea captain who had already gained fame for three previous journeys into the frigid Arctic wilderness. Sir John Franklin began an expedition in 1845 from England in search of a Northwest Passage that would cut off months of travel from Europe to the lucrative trade partners of Asia. He travelled with 138 men (9 of whom exited in Greenland) with visions of adventure and glory, only to find an icy doom.

Though equipped with technological advancements like a metal hull, steam powered propeller added to a wartime sailboat, and for the first time CANNED FOOD, which gave them 3 years worth of provision. However, they were also weighed down with conveniences like a 1,200 volume library, hand organ, china place settings, cut wine goblets, and sterling silver flatware. Their clothing was not adequate for extended exposure in the wild conditions, since the expectation was to stay aboard the ships throughout. However, based on unexpected ice drifts, the two ships got stuck in the ice, lodged in glassy tombs, until the men decided to create make shift sleds out of life boats to try to travel across King William island, but it proved to be a 600 mile journey through pure snow and pain. Instead of casting off needless items, the men tried to carry their world with them. Later rescue efforts found strange relics of Victorian culture strewn along the path: *Vicar of Wakefield prayer books, French copy of the NT, Carpet slippers, chocolate, silver plated utensils, buttons, and a button polisher.* The men had their naval uniforms on with coats over, and eventually died of exposure, scurvy, and lead poisoning (oops, that canned food). It was said they tried to bring their inner culture of their ships into a survival situation, and the consequences were deathly tragic.

Followers of Christ take the same caution. Being a follower of Jesus is an all-encompassing life change, one which requires a shifting of loyalty, love, and pursuit. When we try to bring our **inner culture** of the past, we will not be able to truly follow Christ, with the consequence of being left out. This morning we want to examine the realities of true discipleship, especially in light of wrong views of what it means to be a disciple.

An Invitation to Enter the Kingdom of God (15-24)

The Invite Given (15-17)

Luke 14:15-17 When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "**Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!**"¹⁶ But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many."¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

Jesus had been invited to dinner by the ruler of the Pharisees in order to trip Him up, hoping to find some heresy in His teaching or life. Jesus silenced His enemies, called out their prideful desire to be exalted (14:11), and exposed their zero sum game of quid pro quo social interaction, neglecting those who were in need but could not repay. Jesus turned the tables from being hunted for falsehood to leveling those in the room. It was understandably awkward and tense, so a voice rang out from the gathering to break the tension:

A Revealing Statement:

Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" You could imagine the relief of party at these words. A little sigh of relief, maybe a bit of laughter as this seemed to draw the attention away from their shortcomings back to the ultimate, being their place in the Kingdom. This statement revealed a couple of things:

- **They still missed the point** – This group of religious elite who were charged to lead the people still viewed themselves as good, having earned the top spot in the religious food chain, distinguishing themselves above the *common Jew*. They believed that all of their adherence to the law, their willingness to engage in self-deprivation in minute prescriptions and their ritualistic observance of a self devised system **gained them eternal life**. This is instructive to us. In all false religion, the promise of a good life into eternity is motivation enough to put up with restrictions and burdens imposed on this life. How many people believe that by going to church, giving money, or serving in some capacity can be parlayed into an earned spot in heaven?
- **Jesus sought to shatter their artificial hope** – In His combination of love and truth, Jesus sought to open their eyes to the hopeless nature of their thinking. Jesus NEVER gave someone false hope as to their standing with God, and instead does a direct assault on their self-confidence. He does the same today with us, to anyone who looks to themselves for salvation.

A Banquet Made Ready:

Jesus gave a gracious, deliberate, and pointed parable to expose the thinking of the gathering. A few things to understand about this parable of a banquet:

- **Like a Wedding Reception, but bigger** – One would be invited a ways off and would come to a celebration that would include feasting, celebration, dancing, etc. This banquet would have been the stuff of kings, where it would be a once in a lifetime opportunity. This would be closer to an invite to the White House as opposed to a friends wedding (no offense). The honor would be huge and the event would not want to be missed.
- **There were two invites that would have gone out** – This practice went back to the time of Esther (5:8; 6:14) and extended well in to the 5th century AD when the Midrash on Lamentations said of the men of Jerusalem, “None of them would attend a banquet unless he was invited twice.”¹ In the parable, this invite was the 2nd, meaning all the preparations were made. The picture is of the first invite to Israel by the law and prophets of the OT, which they accepted. Now the Messiah had come, and the second invite to the Kingdom was given.
- **Jesus was the Key to the Kingdom** – The kingdom was owned by God, but there was no entrance without the Master, or Jesus, allowing access. In other words, a denial of Jesus would mean entrance into the future kingdom of peace, hope, and salvation would be closed.

The Excuses Made (18-20)

Luke 14:18-20 But they all alike **began to make excuses**. The first said to him, 'I **have bought a field**, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.'¹⁹ And another said, 'I **have bought five yoke of oxen**, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.'²⁰ And another said, 'I **have married a wife**, and therefore I cannot come.'

Lame Excuses Regarding Possessions:

To the surprise of anyone listening to the parable, the invited guests did what was not only audacious, it was unthinkable. They **excused themselves from the banquet!** Notice that all the excuses given were not based on *bad or wrong things*, but by any measure, were LAME. The first two had to do with already purchased items: land and animals. They both were already secured, but the owners just HAD

¹ R. Kent Hughes, Luke, vol. 2, p. 116.

to go check on them. It would be equivalent to bowing out of the White House dinner because you just HAD to smell the new car smell of a recently purchased car.

Lame Excuses Regarding Affections:

The second set *seemed* more reasonable, but held absolutely no water. A marriage was just entered into, and though the OT gave provision to stay out of the military the first year of marriage (Deut. 20:7; 24:5), there was NO precedent of disengaging from a former commitment because of a spouse. These were bad excuses that thumbed their noses at the master who invited them. It was not simply passing on an invite, it was shaming the master.

Why would they (or anyone) refuse such a gracious, grandiose, and glorious invitation? The reason then is the same reason now. It is not even our possessions or affections, it is the fact we do not want to be there because we do NOT WANT THE MASTER! They did not want Someone who was Lord over them, and so they valued their own independence more than becoming dependent on their Savior. How many do the same today?

The Invite Extended (21-23)

Luke 14:21-23 So the servant came and reported these things to his master. **Then the master of the house became angry** and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the **poor and crippled and blind and lame.**'²² And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'²³ And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.'

Anger of the Master:

Notice that the excuses were not met with a neutral response but one of anger from the Master. There is no neutrality with God. We are either for or against, eternally either covered under His love or an object of His wrath. Salvation in and through Jesus is the only way to satisfy the wrath of God.

Recipients of Extended Invitation:

The recourse of the excuses was not only the denial of those originally invited, but also the extension of the invitation to others:

- **The poor, crippled, blind, and lame of the city** – This was an invitation to all Jews who would understand their mortal condition and yield to the master. This is what Jesus prophesied about His mission in Luke 4 as He read from Isaiah 61:1-2, that He was called to these (also Isaiah 35:5-6 and 29:18-19 show these as those who makeup the kingdom).
- **The people outside of the city** – These would include Gentiles, non-Jews, who would have to be compelled (or persuaded -2 Cor. 5:11; implored – 2 Cor. 5:20) because they did not have the first invitation. This means that Gentiles will have to come to grips with God, their own condition, Jesus Christ, and what it means to follow (Acts 13:46-47; 18:6; 28:23-28).

The Participants Excluded (24)

Luke 14:24 For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."²⁴
The reality is that those who knew about God, the Law, and coming Messiah rejected and were left out of the Kingdom because they were unwilling to see themselves as poor, crippled, blind, and lame. This did not mean that Pharisees or religious leaders COULD NOT be saved (see Nicodemus in John 3 as an example), but only if they were born again. This leaves us with several principles:

- **No one comes to the feast unless they are invited** – This is why the extension to all nations is so dramatic

- **The Feast happens regardless of who was there** – Rejection by some did not delay the timing of the Kingdom
- **God is generous** – His invitation shows that HE is seeking people for salvation
- **The whole point is that the invitation to the banquet comes through Jesus alone.**

An Inspection of the Cost of Discipleship (25-33)

*“What Jesus asked for in this passage is amazingly extreme. He did not call for a **makeover**, but demanded a **takeover**. He challenged sinner to acknowledge Him as sovereign Lord, divine dictator, ruler, controller, king, and master. Jesus never called for anyone to **pray a short, easy prayer to receive eternal life**. Nor did He manipulate anyone to make an emotional decision, or give a false assurance of salvation to shallow interest. He never taught that the way to heaven is broad and easy, but warned that ‘the gat is small and way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matt. 7:14), and said that people would have to force their way into it (Luke 16:16).”²*

This narrative takes place *after* the dinner Jesus was a part of, but Luke very much connects the concepts of the rejection of the Kingdom with the requirements of it, making this section somewhat of an epilogue to the preceding. There are a few clear issues at play in this final section:

- The language is absolute: if one does not make Jesus first priority, he cannot be His disciple – Notice the repeated phrases: **not hate...cannot be; not bear...cannot be; not renounce...cannot be my disciple**
- **A disciple** is a learner, one who learns from another, and discipleship as Jesus describes it here has to do with **allegiance**
- **Discipleship involves a start and a journey** – Both are represented here, though the requirements laid out have to do with the life of a disciple
- **Discipleship is a series of deaths** – Our allegiance to Jesus requires everything, there are no exceptions. We have been crucified with Christ, therefore it is no longer we who live but Christ in us (Gal. 2:20). We have died to ourselves, our lives, and our desires, and what is raised up belongs to and is pointed at Christ.

The Relational Cost (25-27)

Luke 14:25-27 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**

At first glance, this is extremely confusing and causes us to recoil a bit because it seems so contradictory to so much of other Scripture. Is this hyperbole? What does hating a family member mean? Why would Jesus say this?

- **Understanding the Comparison** – The contextual concept of “hate, love” is one of comparison, loving so much that everyone else seems hated. In **Genesis 29** the story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah was told. Remember that Jacob really wanted to marry Rachel, but was duped into marrying Leah (the older sister) first. After taking both as wives it was clear where his affections were: “So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he **loved Rachel more than Leah**, and served Laban another 7 years. When the LORD saw that **Leah was hated**, He opened her womb, but Rachel

² John MacArthur, Luke 11-17, p. 281.

was barren.” Notice that Jacob had *some* love for Leah, but by comparison to Rachel, Leah was hated. This is much like having **my wife as the standard of beauty**. She has first place, is of utmost value, and by comparison I hate all other women (it makes a nice greeting card, but Hallmark has not caught on yet). This is the point Jesus is making: He is our first loyalty and all other relationships take second place.

- **Understanding the Time** –This may not jive in our cultural mindset, but in Jesus day, this would have been a monumental statement. There was no **casual devotion to Jesus because it would have immediately come at a cost**, especially in terms of ones family.

“A decision for Christ marked a person and automatically came with a cost. The modern Western phenomenon where a decision for Christ is popular in a larger social community was not true in Jesus’ setting, which complicates our understanding of the significance of a decision to associate with Christ. Today one might associate with Christ simply because it is culturally appropriate, rather than for true spiritual reasons. Such a decision was impossible in the 1st century.”³

The point is clear: we cannot choose family over Jesus and be a disciple. This means that we may be rejected by family for the sake of Christ, either by our parents or even our children. Each time we do not compromise loyalty to Christ for them, with the paradoxical reality being that when we learn to “hate” our family in comparison with the love we have for Christ, we can actually love them with a greater love, the love empowered by and for Christ.

The Sacrificial Cost (27-32)

Luke 14:27-32 .²⁷ 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? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ 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**.

The second *cost* of following Jesus as a disciple has to do with *bearing our own cross*. This is a call of complete **self abandonment**. It is clear that the person most at odds with our loyalty to Christ alone is ourselves. We tend to see the world by the measure of how it affects us, what we think we deserve, and what we should have. We naturally think that life revolves around us, deserve comfort, security, assurance of the same tomorrow. But in calling us to bear our own cross, Jesus makes it clear that the path to follow Him is **hard, will cause suffering, pain, and cause death**. Death to what our passions and desires may have been. Death to an easy life revolving around us. The call to follow Jesus is a lifestyle of dying to self. And He makes it abundantly clear: this is a one time decision to make the next million decisions (much like choosing to marry and love a spouse). So He gives two clarifying examples:

- **Consider the Cost of Building a Tower....before you build** – In 1973, the state of Indiana and the PSI (Public Service Indiana) set out to build the biggest public works project in their history: a \$700 million nuclear reactor that would not only bring power to the State, but would employ over 250 workers. Construction began in 1977 with 8000 workers, but there were problems immediately with quality control, miscalculations, and fear of nuclear fallout. As a result of cost overruns, construction was halted on January 10, 1984, putting thousands out of work and with

³ Darrell Bock, Luke 9:51-24:53, p. 1285.

a cost of **\$2.8 Billion** spent on a facility that now stands as a memorial to all who planned and failed in this financial disaster

This is the essence of Jesus' point. If you plan on starting a venture, know what you are getting into *before* so that you don't get halfway through and bring shame on yourself in a failure to complete. This is why Jesus described discipleship in terms of a measured, considered commitment, not an emotional response. Following Jesus requires all and is a lifetime venture, one that we will not do perfectly but must be committed to consistently.

- **Consider the Reality of our Position** – There have been many heroic underdog stories in war where the outgunned overcome the odds for victory. We even see glory in defeats like that of the **battle of Thermopylae**, where 300 Spartans lasted days against a numerically superior force of Persians. However, in the end, they still were defeated in that battle (granted it turned the tide of the war). What Jesus' point of the second illustration was to consider the odds stacked against us? A wise King would see his is outmanned 2-1 and instead of sending all his men to die in battle, would sue for peace. Wisdom would say make peace with another instead of sure disaster.

The Material Cost (33)

Luke 14:33 So therefore, any one of you **who does not renounce all** that he has **cannot be my disciple**.

The third and final cost of following Jesus as a disciple is “renouncing all that we have”. Why is this such a poignant summary? Not only was this the stumbling block to the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-31) where a young ruler was unwilling to leave all his wealth to follow Jesus. This is also where we have Jesus utter the principle: “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter into the kingdom”. We are a slave to our idols, and one of the most glaring is that which we can touch, own, and possess. Disciples are called to renounce all.

This also was a counter to the **lame excuses** of the religious leaders, who did not come to the banquet because of a purchased field and oxen. It was difficult then, and it is now, to lay our possessions at the feet of Jesus to follow Him.

What does this look like for us? Again, Jesus is not speaking in hyperbole, so He meant what He said. But it does not mean every Christian needs to sell their house live in a van down by the river. That would fly in the face of other calls to stewardship and understanding of the good gifts given by a good Father. The point is that those who would follow as disciples **must recognize that we are stewards of everything and owner of nothing**. Far too often we think of what we own as ours, not seeing the reality that we are willing slaves of Christ (Rom. 6:22) who are stewards of God's possession, time, and desire. We are truly not our own anymore, but have been bought with a price. We no longer think of ourselves as independent, but radically owned and dependent on our Master. All that we have, possess, feel, desire, and long for are His, done to His glory, for our greatest joy. We give up everything to truly find everything, we die to live, and we give up our life to gain Christ!

Sir John Franklin fell short because he did not consider every cost, but his failure paved the way for others to successfully map and traverse a Northwest passage. They learned from the failures and mistakes of the ones who had gone before. This brings us to today. The invitation to follow Jesus has been given, and the cost has been laid out. Will we consider the cost? Are we compelled by the love of Christ to hate mother and father, take up our cross, and renounce all that we have? This is what is required of us, nothing less.