

The Call to Radical Discipleship, Part 1

Luke 14:25-33

Luke 14:25-35 is a section that is searching and piercing. And at the same time, it is also comforting and encouraging. So, I think you'll see what I mean as we read through the text. Let's begin by reading this morning, Luke 14:25-35. It says this, "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

"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." 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. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 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.”

That is a searching text. It's a piercing text. But for those who follow Christ in discipleship, is an important and encouraging text for us. Both as a reminder, and as an encouragement that these things that are true of discipleship here are actually taking form and shape in our own lives. And I hope both those things come to your minds today as we go through the text. Going back to verse 25, Luke is very brief in setting the scene here, “now great crowds accompanied him.” That's it. That's what he gives for introduction, but it does say enough. It tells us that we have left the company of the religious leaders and the meal setting that we were in, in the first 24 verses of the chapter. We're no longer with the religious leaders, the scribes, the Pharisees around the table.

Now we're back on the road. We're following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. We don't know, because Luke doesn't tell us, we don't know exactly where this is. Where it takes place, we don't know the exact time, but we do know he's traveling again. He's on the move. And Luke tells us that, "great crowds accompanied him." So again, crowds in the plural and then added with great, there are a lot of people here. There is a massive throng, probably thousands of people. And we see by the language that's used here, these thousands of people have a generally positive view of Jesus.

Let me ask you a question. Is Christian discipleship easy? Is it that easy? Is following Jesus Christ a comfortable thing? Relatively relaxed, laid back, stress free. Not really demanding too much of you, but all you can do really is just hang out. Have some good Christian buddies to go fishing with and moms to hang out with other moms and share recipes and child raising tips. Is Christianity an easy thing?

Well, Jesus is here to confront any such notion that being a disciple of his is an easy thing. It is what it is. And you either embrace it for what it is, or you do not. What you cannot do and what you must not do is to be complacent and unthoughtful about following Jesus Christ. That, Jesus will not allow. That's why he turns and faces this crowd to talk to them about true discipleship.

Christian discipleship means loyalty, priority, and prosperity. And let me just expand each of those three words. To say that Christian discipleship is a radical realignment of loyalty. And Christian discipleship is secondly, a radical resetting of priority. And then thirdly, Christian discipleship is also a radical redefinition of prosperity. It is true that Christianity is about prosperity, but not in the way most people think. And so, as we come to Christ, we understand that we need to radically redefine prosperity and understand it in his terms and not ours.

Let's get into point one, a radical realignment of loyalty. Jesus turns around here to speak to the thousands who are following after him. As he turns around and looks at them, and

I'm sure it took a bit for thousands of people to quiet down and realize they're not moving still. To stop and see what's going on and look ahead and there's Jesus standing ahead of them. And as everybody quiets down to hear what their leader's going to say, and he speaks directly to them. The grammar is emphatic about that point.

Verse 26 says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters," many of whom were probably accompanying each other in the crowd, "Yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." The main clause in that sentence comes at the very end. "He cannot be my disciple." That's the main clause, and he repeats it. End of verse 27, "He cannot be my disciple," again in verse 33, same thing. "He cannot be my disciple."

Now, lest we make the mistake of thinking Jesus doesn't really want any disciples. That's, that's not what's going on here. It's just that Jesus isn't interested in pretend disciples. And there are a lot of those. He's not interested in a whole heap of fickle minded followers. There are plenty of those too. He's not about boosting his online presence with the

number of followers and fans and friends and all that stuff. He does not care at all about numbers. Why do so many people today care about numbers? Jesus does not.

So what Jesus is doing here is culling the crowd. He's removing anyone who does not belong there. He says if you're coming with the wrong loyalties, with a misaligned set of allegiances, look, you can't come. Go no further. Stop here, turn around, go back. John Owen in the, reminded of his book, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, was just defending particular redemption. Fantastic book, never been answered. And he has in the introduction, he says, "if you come like so many shoppers coming in just to browse and look around, you've had your entertainment, goodbye."

Jesus is doing something similar here. Turn around, go home, because Christian discipleship means loyalty to Christ, loyalty to God over family. And man, that is the most intimate of human relationships, isn't it? He goes even further and pierces into the most intimate place of all. Our own personal holy of holies, which is the self. And he says, "Yes, even his

own life." If you have a greater allegiance to that. Turn around and go home.

So, for example, we see the same kind of thing, especially in the Old Testament in wisdom literature and that kind of thing. But we see, starting even in Genesis 29:31, when the Lord saw that Leah, Jacob's wife, Leah, was hated. He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Jacob didn't literally hate his wife, Leah. He didn't detest her. Jacob loved Leah as well as Rachel. He came to see God's incredible gift in giving Leah half the tribes of Israel came through her womb. But Jacob did, at least initially prefer Rachel over Leah.

Same thing here. Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own parents, his wife, his children, his siblings, even his own life, he can't, he cannot be my disciple." That's what he says. What he means by what he says is this. Your allegiance to me must be higher than the allegiance you show to your family members, and even to yourself as well. Your own interests or the interests of your family or the demands of your family, all of which bear the highest priority in any human life. That gets knocked down, as many

notches it needs to, in priority in your life because God and his interest, and Christ and his interests are at the top of the priority list. That's what he's saying.

That's how Jesus meant it, and that's how this original audience understood it. Nobody took up stones to stone him because he's teaching them to violate the fifth commandment. Just to punctuate the point, in case you're not convinced, Matthew 10:37, which is kind of a parallel. Jesus is giving the same teaching that he gives here, but he's doing it in another setting. And instead of using the starker word hate, he uses the opposite word love. "Whoever loves his father or mother more than me. He's not worthy of me and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." So, you see the *more than* comparison there. Our love for, our affection for, our loyalty to, our allegiance to our closest family ties; father, mother, spouse, and children, brothers and sisters. The highest natural loyalties that we have on this earth.

Yes, even to our own self-interest. Our love for God, our affection for God, our allegiance to God has to be higher still, infinitely higher. As high as he is, which separates us from the



world and all the relations here as much as creature is separated from his creator. The relationship to family members and any other human relationship takes a backseat to Christ and his interests. Even our own lives, all that constitutes what it means to be ourselves. He's greater. He is greater. Commentator E. Earl Ellis says we are to, quote, "utterly subordinate anything, even our own being to our commitment to Jesus."

James Edwards says it this way, "When the good rivals the best, then it must be hated." That's the idea here. So, if anyone comes to Jesus and he's holding any human allegiance higher. Jesus says he cannot be my disciple. Notice he's not saying he's not allowed to be my disciple. He's saying it's not possible. He can't be my disciple because, definitionally, what a disciple is, is highest loyalty God, highest loyalty, Jesus. That is what it is to be a disciple. If that's not you, you can't be a disciple. You don't belong. You're not numbered among them. Holding any loyalty higher than him, it fatally undermines the very definition of what it is to be a disciple.

Now, if you're thinking okay, I got it. It's pretty radical, but I think I can manage this. I think I can pull this

off. I can still follow along. Hold that thought. Because I want to show you just how radical a commitment Jesus has in his mind as he speaks to this crowd. Turn over to Deuteronomy. Back in your Bible to Deuteronomy for a couple of examples there. I just want to show you how radical this loyalty is. And what it can really cost to hold God in the very highest esteem, higher than any other relation in your life. This is what it can cost.

Let's go to Deuteronomy and start in Chapter 6. We'll start with Shema of Israel. That great doctrinal confession of Israel. Deuteronomy chapter 6, and verse 4. Here's the confession that every Jew made. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Our English translations, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. That's a representation of the divine name which is Yahweh. Yahweh, I am that I am, or I am who I am. It's like a sentence. It's a sentence of essence in existence. So, "Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is one." And then verse five, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." And stop there.

That simple confession. It speaks of the absolute oneness of God. Singular in his essence that there is no one else who is

God, no one else who shares that essence. And the implications of his singular Godness. That there is only one God, one deity. There is no other category of deity. He alone occupies the singular category called Deity Divine. The implications of that are profound. The doctrine of divine simplicity comes out of this affirmation. God's aseity, his absolute independence. Self-sufficiency, his eternity, his infinitude. In fact, all of his glorious attributes cascade out of that one proclamation. That God is one. Everything follows from that confession.

So, a being like that, there is one and only one of that kind of being. As he declares repeatedly in Isaiah 45, "I am Yahweh and there is no other God." Nobody shares this category called Godness, called Deity, called Divine. Nobody else has that attribute, just me. A being like that, deserves our absolute, unqualified love and loyalty. He is the only being, who, by virtue of his perfections, demands complete allegiance. Demands all of our love with all of our heart and soul and strength and mind. Who he is in his essence, requires wholehearted, unmitigated, unqualified obedience and loving devotion. None of us love him as we ought to, right?

But let me tell you. That is the kind of love that Jesus has for his God. That is the kind of love that he practiced without fail. There was not one break in his love for one moment of time. There was not one diminishment on the scale and the register of the strength of his love for God at any time at all. It didn't wane or wax. It was full on, hundred percent, dialed to ten throughout his life from start to finish. His love is an absolutely perfect love and so, since ours is not and it is a sin not to obey God, is it not?

Aren't you grateful that he is your substitutionary sacrifice? Aren't you grateful that he is your perfect atonement? That we, united to him, all of our sin is taken away. He paid for it. All of this absence of love in our hearts. All this coldness that we ought not to have for a being like this. He took it away in his death on the cross. Not only that, but his perfect life is given to us. We're united to him, and so the father looks at us as if we did everything that he did. Is it not a miracle that he would think of us, look at us and see his son in us. That's the love that Jesus has for God.

And get this, that is the love that he calls for among all those who follow him. Among all those who call him Lord, among all those who say that they are his disciples, that is the kind of love. The word I have for our God. Anything less than that kind of love is disloyalty. It is, you say, but I don't always practice that even the best Christians I know don't practice that. Yeah, that doesn't diminish the demand. It just says you're failing. That's all it says. But that's why the gospel is so precious to us, because in all of our failure he never failed. Anyone who holds to any other allegiance, listen, commits treachery against God of the highest order.

So, to see what I mean by that, let's go from Deuteronomy 6 and flip over a couple of pages to the right. To the 13th chapter. Deuteronomy 13, when put to the test, here is what that love for God, and that loyalty to God. When put to the test, this is what it looks like. Look at Deuteronomy 13:6, "If your brother, the son of your mother," just to be specific, "or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who, as your own soul." Man, notice how Moses is ladening the language there with affection and love and friendship. And oh,

the wife you embrace and love, and your children, and your friend, who as your own soul.”

Many of them “entices you secretly saying, ‘hey, let's go and serve other gods,’ which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near to you or far off from you, or from one end of the earth to the other. You shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And all Israel shall hear and fear never again do any such wickedness as this among you.”

Okay, that's radical. Right? Somebody write a book on that, pass it around here in our country, radical, kill your family members, right? Listen, stop though and, and, and take that in. When you picture your own family members executed in that fashion, and by your own hand. Well, that's what loving God with

all your heart with all your soul with all your might, that's what loving God means and requires. Your family member, after all, had the audacity to try to draw you away from the God you supremely love. He's the God who rescued you out of the land of Egypt, out of idolatry. You want to go back into idolatry? Someone's going to entice you into that, even your closest relations? How dare they. It's tough. It's clear, isn't it? I mean, it's like no mistaking what it's saying there. But man, isn't it hard to think that way?

Let this text sink in. And think about the tests of your loyalty that would come to you with a family member. Who do you love more, God or family? Who really has your allegiance? Who really gets your attention? Who really takes your time? Jesus is calling for true disciples. Those who love God over all.

Again, we're not in a position to throw literal stones. I mean call me weak, but I am thankful I'm not in that position anymore. That is really, really tough. But listen, what about you? Will you at least confront them? Okay, so we're not going to pick up a rock and throw it at somebody, but would you even challenge somebody in your family, who's embracing an aberrant

theology? Who's living a sinful lifestyle, will you even challenge it? Will you confront it? If need be, would you separate from that? Would you limit your time? No one comes to us today saying come on, let's go to the temple of Molek. Let's burn some children, drink some blood. Nobody's saying that, right?

So it may seem easy to dismiss these things in the Bible and say that's for yesterday. We're in a much friendlier, more polite time living in our world. What about compromising convictions? Going soft on sin, embracing softer, gentler views of God? As a more tolerant, more accepting, more loving deity than you have made him out to be. Ah, it's you in that church, you guys are hard people, hard. My God's not like that. He's so kind, loves people.

They want you to ignore what the Bible says about God's love of righteousness, about the evidence of his judgment. They want you to maintain the relationship with them and overlook stuff with always the little carrot that's held out in front of your nose of having more influence with them. If you'll just



overlook this, yeah, maybe, maybe your God will appear friendly to me. And I'll, maybe I'll consider him.

Look some of you I know are feeling this right now. Things like this are being played out in your life and in your family. In your relationships and your friendships. There are irreligious people, some of them family members, who are making claims on your time and your energy. They're setting expectations for you on how you ought to think, how you ought to relate to them, what you ought to do with time and attention and money, and all the rest. They tug at your heartstrings. Why? Because they're your own flesh and blood. Obviously, they tug at your heartstrings.

But they for themselves. They live with no other higher priority in their life than themselves. And they want you to act accordingly. They want you to spin around them as the center of the universe. They want you to accommodate their idolatry of the self and walk in lockstep. But Deuteronomy 13:4, your God is the Lord. Not them. "You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him."