

The Terrible Tragedy of a Nominal Christian, Part 1

Luke 14:34-35

Go ahead and open your Bibles to Luke chapter 14, just two verses for today. At the end of Luke 14, verses 34 and 35, two verses, but a lot to learn. As we come to the close of this great chapter, Jesus issues a warning. And the warning is for nominal disciples. That is to say, these are disciples in name only, but not in heart, not in conduct.

They're disciples in name only. They are following after Jesus, like the crowd that he's speaking to, that he's confronting. They're following after him, but they don't really know him, they don't really get what his life and ministry is about. So Jesus stops them in their tracks, he calls for some serious self reflection, some sober minded, self examination, so that he might call some true disciples and see them emerge from this crowd of fickle minded followers.

Let's return to verse 25, and just remind ourselves of the context of what is going on. "Now great crowds accompanied him,

and he turned in 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 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 asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.'" That outlines pretty clearly in very stark terms, what true discipleship requires, it's straight from the words of Jesus himself.

Fundamentally, discipleship means a radical change of mind, you have to see that there, a radical change of mind.

It's something that works from the inside and comes out to the outside. It's a way of thinking that results in a way of living, in a way of walking, change results in a radical realignment of loyalty. That's what verse 26 says. No longer are family relationships paramount, but now the relationship that matters most is that with God and his Son, Jesus Christ. The change results in a radical resetting of priority, verse 27. The priority is on cross bearing, in being obedient to Christ commands which brings the rejection of the world. And so thus the cross, the cross that is the symbol of rejection of the world, ultimate rejection in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

And then finally, that change results in a radical redefinition of prosperity, which is clarified in the story of the king facing a death threat. Grave, grave challenge of another king coming into his land with an army, clarifies all that really matters. He starts to clarify prosperity as life itself and life itself, really, that comes from God, so thinks about whether he can win that battle or whether he needs to sue for peace. Either way, he is clarifying what prosperity is. And Jesus says, so renounce everything else, renounce everything and

clarify what prosperity is, it's knowing God, it's knowing Christ.

Without those radical changes on the inside, a radical change in the heart, the mind, the thinking and that is, by the way, predicated on a change of nature, that can only happen by the Spirit. That's called regeneration. That's called being born again. Without that radical internal change of nature. Not only will there be no external changes, there will be no reality of discipleship at all. No radical change, no true discipleship. If your life looks just religious, you really have to question, Do I know Jesus Christ is Lord? Do I know God? Am I reconciled to him? Have I been born again?

Because all these people were religious. He's calling them to something else. All of them sacrificed, all of them went to the temple, all of them went to synagogue every single week. Just like we go to church every single week. Jesus isn't speaking to the irreligious. He's not speaking to the pagan world here, he's speaking to what looks like on the outside faithful Jews, look like everybody else. It's why he comes to the end here, with a challenge, two verses Luke 14:34 and 35.

And he says this, "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."

And then this, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

This is how Jesus concludes his confrontation to those thousands who've been following along behind him, this is the situation of many in the crowds of thousands, following after him, and I gotta tell you, it is the same situation that many are in today. So many who are professing to be Christians, but we know that there is no real internal change because we don't see any evidence in their life. Some people, you don't know them well enough, all you can see on the surface is they attended to church, a profession of faith, they listen to Christian radio stations, it's all you can see.

But what's passed for Christianity in our land for the last number of decades on a popular level, really has everyone passing through a very, very wide gate, and walking undisturbed along a very broad road, taking the easiest way. They've fooled themselves into thinking that it's Christianity that they've embraced, but it's really the way that leads to destruction. And

Jesus said that, "There are many who go in by that gate," and walk along that road. One day, Jesus is gonna hear the protest coming from those many, who think they've embraced Christianity, as they say to him, "Lord, Lord," but he will turn away from them. He'll declare to them, "I never knew you depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

So Jesus calls out once again, here clarifying the radical demands of discipleship and here at the end, providing one more warning to this crowd in the form of another parable. And those with the ears to hear, they will hear, those with the ears to hear, they will come, they will embrace this radical demand of discipleship. Because God has given them ears to hear. My hope for you today, the many of you are not nominal Christians, but actually the real deal, truly in the faith. You know the Lord, you love the Lord, you have confronted these radical demands, and maybe it's cost you, it's cost you relationships, it's cost you jobs, it's cost you money, it's cost you all kinds of things.

And you look at this, and you say, That's what I want, more than anything. When you heard last week's sermon, you said,

Amen, yes and amen. And I will follow Christ. But I realize that in a group of this size or really a group of any size, I realize that there are those who are nominal, there are those who are going through the motions, there are those who have yet to really reckon with these demands. And so for the true Christians among us, I hope that this steels your resolve, what we hear today. Some hard words from Christ, and I hope it steels your resolve. I hope it causes you to double down on your commitment because God has truly made you new, and you return and revisit these demands from Christ and you long to follow him, no matter what it costs you.

But for those who do not yet know or understand, those who have yet to reckon with these demands. I hope that what Jesus says here troubles you. If it doesn't trouble you and it glances off of your head and darts into another direction because your head is hard, and your spine is stiff, and you have no ears to hear, that would be a judgment. And I pray that that is not you. I hope instead that your heart is soft, and that these words will penetrate and trouble you, trouble you to the point of salvation, that you go through the difficult work of repentance, that the spirit would cause you to be born again and you would

embrace Jesus Christ, and know his true salvation.

Because listen, this life is so short, we're going to be gone, like a vapor coming off a, steam off a cup of coffee, like a flower the field that passes away this winter, eternity. Well, it's eternal; it's forever. And I want you to know him forever. That parable features the nature of salt, just one little salt grain, tiny little mineral with great, great influence. Just a few grains sprinkled on your food and you can tell, it's barely visible to the eye, but there's enough there to enhance the flavor of your food and increase the pleasure of eating. Small little grains of salt, but great, great influence because of the nature of salt. Take away the saltiness of salt and it's useless. Same thing with discipleship. Same thing is true of true Christianity.

Not many true disciples in the world at any given time, but just a few sprinkled throughout society and culture and they are enough to have profound influence. The only caveat is that they must be true disciples. They must be true Christians, after the manner that Jesus has described following the pattern he's laid out for us. That's why there's a lot of question when we see our

country going the direction it's going. How many true ones are out there?

A lot of false ones though. And like salt losing saltiness, if that were possible, they too would be worthless, terribly misleading. You think you're picking up salt, looks like salt, but there's nothing there. You think you're dealing with a true Christian, a true disciple, when you get into the midst of his life and his thinking, nothing there. It's misleading.

So if salt is to be effective, it must be salty. If Christians are to have any effect, they must be Christianly, real Christians. So three points, very simple: The metaphor, the meaning and the message. The metaphor of salt, the meaning of this metaphor, and then the message, that is, what are the implications of this? What are we to take away from it? So first point, the metaphor. The parable assumes a general knowledge about the properties of salt. That I think Jesus is safe to assume that his audience and our audience today, we understand the properties of salt.

It's a common mineral compound used every day, in every culture, in every place of the world. And throughout human history. Usefulness of salt is universally acknowledged, universally appreciated, universally used. So common table salt, it's a mineral compound, sodium chloride, there's about 40% sodium, 60% chloride, and salt comes from mineral deposits that we can either mine out of the earth or draw from salt saturated water, like seawater. So we evaporate the water and then harvest the crystallized salt that lays on the ground afterwards.

Jesus says, it's just almost a truism to say this "Salt is good." The word good is *kalos*. It could be morally good or ethically good, but he's not talking about that with salt. He's using the word good in the sense of useful, beneficial, it's helpful to have salt, how so? Well, just outlining a few things that seem to hold true over time, several ways. First, salt is good for seasoning food, it enhances the flavors of our foods. What would potato chips be without salt? I mean, low sodium potato chips or no sodium potato chips. What is the point? Right? Gotta have the salt.

In small concentrations as my wife likes to remind me, in small concentrations, salt enhances sweetness and mitigates the bitterness of foods. So those properties of enhancing sweetness and lessening bitterness in food allows our taste receptors in our mouths to detect other more subtle flavors that are already in the food. So because of how salt interacts with the water that's in the food, which has a diluting effect on food flavor. Salt helps to concentrate and then strengthen the less dominant flavors and draw them out, allow our tongues to detect them.

Salt was also essential, especially in the ancient world. And you got to think about this before refrigeration. Refrigeration is a miracle of the modern age, we're so grateful that we're not having to salt all of our meat, but we can put it in a freezer. But it's essential back in the ancient world for preserving meat, so add salt to meat, the salt will absorb the moisture that's in the meat which creates a drier environment, where it's harder for bacteria to grow. Slowed bacteria growing, it slows the decay of the meat which means the meat will keep longer, that was massively important for those who traveled in the ancient world and had to carry meat with them. Think about

soldiers going out on a long campaigns. They needed meat.

They needed protein to strengthen their bodies to get ready to engage on the battlefield. So essential to have salt. So when Jesus says, "Salt is good." It's an understated way of saying salt is really essential for life. Everyone understood its value. Which is why Jesus uses this metaphor, understood fully in the ancient world. He uses this metaphor for believers, Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt of the earth."

So with that little brief review in mind, think about the richness of Palestine, in particular the land of Israel, the promised land in particular because of salt. What natural resource did the land of Palestine have? Where did first century Jews find an endless supply of salt? In the Dead Sea. And that's where the Jews harvested their salt. Gathering what was left over after evaporation that left behind this mineral mixture crystallize there on the ground with a high concentration of salt. So continuing Jesus' metaphor, "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."

It's actually impossible for salt to lose its taste. James Edwards points this out, he says "Salt is a very stable compound that does not degrade naturally. Nor does it lose its physical properties including flavor, apart from a chemical reaction." So how do we understand Jesus' point here about salt losing its taste? One way to interpret this is to understand that Jesus here is speaking hypothetically, like, If salt could lose its taste, it would be worthless, utterly useless. That is the simplest option, simplest options is often the best. But I think since Jesus elaborates here, when he says "It is of no use either for the soil over the manure pile." He seems to be describing the experience that his audience would be able to imagine, an experience that maybe some of them have had before.

Since salt had such a wide range of uses in a rural setting, an agricultural setting we can think about salt from the Dead Sea purchased by a farmer in the area in bulk, keep the price down so it's not highly refined. Salt bought in bulk would not come in its purest form. It had other minerals around the

Dead Sea that other minerals mixed in like magnesium, calcium, sulfur, bromide, iodine, potassium, that's just to name a few of the 21 different minerals that can be found in Dead Sea salt. So it's not completely pure as it comes from the market. Bulk salts would need to be purchased maybe at a lower price because it avoids the refinement.

But then purified back at the farm, so the farmer stored his bulk supply of unrefined salt, he drew out only what he needed, when he needed it, put the impure salt through the distillation process there on his farm as the need arose. He used the purest salt for his family, less pure, maybe for his animals, less pure evens further still to cure fish or meat or cure hides. In the event though, that his bulk storage developed a water leak say, the water would leach the salt from the bulk supply, would run out with the water, leaving behind a very low concentration of salt on a far higher concentration of all those other minerals. To the naked eye. It all looked the same.

It all looked in the supply container, like salt, but the quality had changed dramatically, radically, something was different. The net effect would be that the whole supply left in

that container was essentially worthless. So disappointing. So costly. It looked very much the same, but in substance, in reality, it was actually radically different. The only thing to do is to throw away the entire lot, cut your losses, and learn your lesson.

Go fix your containers, go fix the leaky roof or whatever it is, and then start over. So all that to say, ruined bulk supply of salt would be totally worthless to the farmer, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, expanding this a little bit, he said "It's no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

So you would take whatever's left over after the ruination. And you would just use it for ground covering for a footpath and everybody would walk on it. That's it's only use. So that is the metaphor. Unpack briefly, but it's enough to help us who live in an age of refrigeration to understand the metaphor. Makes sense to us now. Okay, so as we turn to point two, we're asking the question, what does it mean? What does this metaphor mean? What is Jesus driving at?

So number two, the meaning in the original text, verse 34, that verse starts with the word, therefore, it's not translated doesn't carry over into the ESV translation. But Jesus literally says here, "Therefore, salt is good. But if salt is lost it taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" So what we need to do is to remember that verses 34, and 35, are a logical conclusion to verses 25 to 33.

So that means the connection to Jesus teaching on discipleship helps to determine the meaning of the parable that he uses here at the end. So if salt is the metaphor, what is it stands for? Looking back at what Jesus just taught, what does salt symbolizes? Very simply put, the salt stands for the true disciple. Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt." You're the salt. You're the salt of the earth. And by the way, here we read, "Salt is good." So salt is good, the true disciple is good. Why is that? Salt stands for the true disciple, the one who has his loyalties properly aligned, the one who lives by a single minded priority of cross bearing, coming after Jesus.

This is the one who's calculated the cost, the one who's discerned the true meaning of prosperity, the only prosperity

that matters for him is eternal life from God. And so he readily, eagerly renounces all that he has selling all to buy that one pearl, the pearl of great price. Why is that so good? Because he gets, what life is all about. He understands meaning, he understands purpose, he understands significance. And he's there as a testimony to the entire world to check their decay, to preserve the world from decay. That is a good thing.

He's there, his life stands as a protest to all that they count as valuable. He's also by his influence and testimony able to win some, so he's good. He's pulling people back from the brink of destruction. Being a true disciple is good for the world. It's good for our community. It's good for Greeley. So if salt stands for the true disciple. What is the quality of saltiness stand for? Saltiness simply put is, that which makes a true disciple, true.

It's what makes him the real deal, the genuine article. Saltiness is that which can be tasted, by the way, you might say, tested by other people. There's a certain flavor, certain taste, there's a sense that others get, it's unmistakable. Whenever they're in the accompany of a true disciple. They can

see evidence that this person holds a singular allegiance. He's loyal to the death, even if it costs him family relationships. He's loyal to the death to God and God alone.

People can see that in his presence. They can see the evidence this person lives for one priority, in one priority alone, and that is to bear his cross. He's living to endure the weight of suffering for the sake of the son of man. He's living to follow Jesus Christ forever into eternity itself. There's a certain taste, a flavor, a sense that other people get in the company of a true disciple that this person is unshackled. Any earthbound definition of health, wealth, and prosperity. He doesn't care about wealth. He doesn't care about rich salaries. He doesn't care about big influence, fame, fortune. His eyes are fixed on things that are above.

He sees unseen realities. He pursues invisible glories all reserved in heaven for him. He does not count his best life as now, but then. He understands suffering is for now, difficulty is for now, he'll endure whatever suffering comes during this life because he's believed the tender assurances of his beloved savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true shepherd who says, "Fear

not little flock, it's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Therefore, let your hand be loose about everything else, give it all away."

The metaphor here is negatively oriented. It's oriented that way in order to deliver a warning from the Lord. Therefore "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."

So the meaning of what Jesus says is this, if someone professes to be a true disciple, if someone claims to follow Jesus in discipleship, whatever it is that maybe at one time distinguished him as a disciple, if that is leached away, if that fades over time, if what was once maybe apparent, now is dulled and subdued and no longer really apparent at all. Such a person is in a most desperate condition. One in which restoration really seems impossible.

The almost certain expectation about such a person is that that person will be cast away forever lost in eternal judgment.

PILLAR OF —TRUTH—



This is the warning Jesus gives to nominal Christians: Beware, wake up, whether they're settled in their complacency of being lukewarm, or whether they are falling among backsliders and drifting, or whether they've hit the bottom and they're now apostates. If you are a Christian in name only, beware.