

Luke 14:25-35 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ²⁸ "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it -- ²⁹ "lest, after he has laid the 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 to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² "Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. ³³ "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. ³⁴ " Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? ³⁵ "It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Dear friends, allow me to use the first couple minutes of the sermon today briefly to tell you about something very exciting. Tomorrow, construction crews will begin work on a new fellowship hall complete with modern restrooms just east of the parsonage. I know you may not have heard much about this, but someone suggested such a move, and it seemed like a good idea. So tomorrow construction begins. I trust that you will support the project. I just can't wait until we are able to use it.

Are any of you a little troubled? How many questions have run through your head? How will we afford it? Why east of the parsonage? Who made this decision? Well, to calm your minds, there will be no crews here tomorrow. Indeed it would be quite outlandish to begin such a project without first considering all that would be involved. It would be ridiculous to not really think about it before the crews began their work. It would be unreasonable to begin before really counting the cost of such a project.

So also, Jesus says that when we think about following Him, we too should consider the cost. We should not just jump right in without considering what such a lifestyle might cost us. And Jesus gives us two pretty hefty things to think about. He lists two things that following Him might just cost those who follow. First, He reminds that it might cause family strife. Yes, following Jesus means that even blood relation can not be our first priority. Secondly, He says that it might cause the one who follows to endure open persecution for the sake of the cross and that that persecution might result in the loss of one's life. Are you read to lose your

family or even your life over this Jesus? Indeed, Jesus says that we must be ready to forsake everything else to follow Him.

For us, these questions often seem very hypothetical. And no doubt, it is easier to answer yes to such questions when we know that our family will probably not leave us for following Christ. It is easier to answer yes when there is no immediate threat of imprisonment or martyrdom for being a Christian. But today we must look beyond the immediate situation. For, if we this day consider only the immediate situation when asked these questions, we have not truly considered the cost of discipleship. For the cost of discipleship can indeed be very high.

Indeed, there are many Christians around the world that must answer tough questions about their faith without the luxury of hypothetical situations. In almost any Muslim country, following Christ means removal from the fellowship of your family. In most of these countries, converting to Christianity is considered treason against the family itself. Failure to leave Christianity necessarily means leaving your family behind. There is no hypothetical question but a very real choice. Jesus or family?

In China, many Christians, and particularly their pastors are regularly taken and imprisoned for their belief in Jesus. Only if they recant their faith will they be free. There is no hypothetical question but a very real choice. Jesus or freedom?

In the nation of Sudan, over the last several years nearly all of the Christians in the country have faced open persecution. The true reality is that most of the church there has been killed for their beliefs. For them there is no hypothetical choice but a real decision. Convert to Islam or die. Jesus or your life?

Imagine following Christ in those countries. Put simply, would you? If following Christ meant the loss of your family, if it meant the loss of your freedom, if it meant the loss of your life? Would you still follow?

This is the type of consideration Christ calls us to this day. For realize that these things may one day happen in this country also. Just 400 years ago, Sudan was a Christian nation, and now faces the most severe persecution anywhere in the world. Already in parts of our country, those who still believe in what the Bible says face mockery. How long will it be until it gets worse? I hope a long time, but perhaps not.

Whatever the case, we must examine the cost of walking with Jesus this day. We must consider if we are ready to walk with him whatever the cost. Surely even in our country today there are still real questions to be asked. We must consider if we are willing to set aside things in our lives that cannot be taken along the walk with Christ. Are we willing to live behind friends that also lead us into sinful ways? Are we willing to leave our pride behind as we are looked at and laughed upon as odd in order to walk with Him? And, perhaps most pressing, are we willing to leave behind those sins that we like the most in order to walk with Jesus?

For, Jesus says most clearly, “If we are not ready to do such things, we cannot be his disciples.” We cannot serve two or three masters. Jesus must be the number one priority in our lives and we must be ready to sacrifice anything else in our lives in order to keep it that way. This is what we find when we consider the cost of following Jesus. Jesus must be number one. Nothing less will do.

This realization is at the very least challenging and at the most downright terrifying. Are we ready for such a walk?

Well, it depends where we place our focus. If we are looking to ourselves alone to walk this walk, we are certainly not prepared to follow Him. We do not have the endurance to face all the temptations and persecutions that will come along the path. The cost of discipleship would simply be too much.

But the good news today is that we do not walk alone. Jesus leads us. He walks beside us. He dwells in us. And because Jesus leads us, we are ready to follow. Because Jesus has called us His own in Baptism and has filled us with His Holy Spirit, we are ready to follow wherever He leads. Because He stays close by us every day through His word and feeds us often with His Supper, we are ready to follow Him as He leads.

We are ready to follow because this day we consider not only the cost of discipleship but also the Christ of discipleship. We consider all that He endured for us. We consider that He has died for each of our sins on the cross. We consider that He has risen so that He can still be living and active in our lives. And we know that He has gone to prepare a place for us. Because of His undying love to us, we are ready to follow Him whatever trouble we find along the path He chooses.

As our sermon hymn says,

“Jesus, lead Thou on
Till our rest is won;
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow calm and fearless.
Guide us by Thy hand
To our fatherland.

Yes, we will follow Christ and will sacrifice all other things. Jesus or family? We will take Jesus. Jesus or freedom? We will we take Jesus. Jesus or our very lives? We will take Jesus. For we know the cost of discipleship, but even better we know the Christ of discipleship. Amen.