

Luke 14:25–35: ²⁵Now great crowds accompanied [Jesus], 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. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or 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? ³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³So 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? ³⁵It 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.”

The Cost of Discipleship

INTRODUCTION

Jesus says a couple of very shocking things about being a disciple in today’s reading from St. Luke. First He says, “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.”

Hate is a strong word, isn’t it? You’re not supposed to hate, especially your children! But Jesus is using hyperbole to make a point about following Him: “There’s nothing more important than discipleship, so don’t let anything—not your friends, not your family, not even your own life—come between you and Jesus, for what good are any of these things if they cost you your discipleship and thus your salvation!

Then Jesus says a second, shocking thing. ²⁷“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” This may not sound shocking, but it is.

I say this is shocking because we live in a world that values ease and comfort, and it especially values giving the self whatever it desires. But to bear your cross is just the opposite—it is to deny the self and all of its wants and desires. And furthermore, it is a willingness to suffer the loss of everything for Jesus—even your life.

Probably the best sermon on this text is a book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor who was executed in connection with a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler during WWII. In his famous book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

Through these two shocking statements, Jesus is asking you this question:

ARE YOU ABLE TO PAY THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP? IT ISN'T CHEAP—IT MEANS SACRIFICING EVERYTHING THAT COMES BETWEEN YOU AND JESUS, AND TO SUFFER THE LOSS OF EVERYTHING—EVEN YOUR LIFE—TO FOLLOW JESUS.

I. First, consider carefully the cost.

Before a potential disciple answers that question, Jesus asks him to consider the cost of following Him, because failure could be disastrous. So He provides two examples, “²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

³¹Or 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?

³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”

There's a man in southern California who recently got into trouble with the law and his neighbors. In April, Rami Nassif was convicted on 13 misdemeanor charges related to maintaining a public nuisance and safety hazard. What was that public nuisance and safety hazard? In 2003, Nassif took out a loan to build a \$650,000 Mediterranean-style house in Redondo Beach. After getting much of the exterior of the house built, Nassif ran out of money and defaulted on his loan. Now, the half-finished house sits empty, rotting away—a plywood fire hazard—and place where wildlife and even wilder teens hang out and party.

Nassif's failure to count the cost made him a laughing stock of his neighborhood, and subject to perhaps as much as two years in jail.

“Consider the cost of discipleship,” Jesus asks. “³³So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” “If you can't pay the cost of discipleship, you can't follow Me,” Jesus says.

Again, those are shocking words, meant to awaken sleepy and contented hearts. This is an announcement that God's grace is free, but isn't cheap—it cost Jesus His life—and it might cost you yours, too! Jesus didn't die to make you happy or wealthy or healthy—Jesus bore His cross to save you from your sins. It wasn't easy for Jesus to bear His cross, and it won't be easy to bear your cross, so consider the cost of following Jesus.

II. Can you pay the real cost?

Let's do that for a moment. Let's talk about the real cost of discipleship. The cost of bearing your cross and following Jesus includes being like Jesus. That means loving your enemies, forgiving every sinner who offends you, complete subordination to the teachings and authority of God's Word, and giving of your time, money and possessions to the point your sacrifice reflects Christ's sacrifice.

It means giving up the right to seek reparation for wrongs, but instead to turn the other cheek. There's no right to victimhood under the cross—instead there is only love and forgiveness for those who sin against you because you are a Christian. The cost of discipleship is to forgive as completely as Jesus forgives.

Jesus said, ³⁴“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵It 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.”

To be salt means to live a life that honors the sacrifices Christ made for you—and to bring the love of Christ into this world in everything that you think, say, and do. If you cannot pay the cost of discipleship, you are worthless salt. That's another shocking statement!

Well, can you pay the cost of discipleship? Do you have a perfect love for God and neighbor? Are you willing to sacrifice everything that comes between you and Jesus? Do you have a fully forgiving heart? Think about this: Is there anything further from being a disciple of Christ than to withhold forgiveness from a brother or sister in Christ? Is it not the height of hypocrisy to come to the Communion rail to receive the body and blood of Jesus for your forgiveness, but then refuse such forgiveness to another?

Can you pay the cost of discipleship? No! None of us can!

III. Jesus pays the cost of discipleship.

What Jesus says here is certainly Law. And the point of preaching the Law is to show you that you cannot keep the Law. There is no way any of us can pay the cost of discipleship. We're all sinners! Are you surprised? If you could pay the cost of discipleship, you wouldn't need Jesus. What Jesus asks you to give up is any notion that you can be His disciple and follow Him to heaven through your own efforts and power! Not your friends, not your closest relatives, not

you yourselves on your best, most pious day, can furnish you with the forgiveness of sins and the strength to live the Christian life. You cannot win the victory over sin and death and the devil through your own resources.

You cannot pay the cost of discipleship! Instead, Jesus pays the cost, and imputes that cost to you by God's grace through the gift of faith. Jesus denied every physical and earthly need or want that came between Him and His heavenly Father. And Jesus bore a cross that only the God-Man could bear—the cross of Calvary—where Jesus bore the wrath of God for the sins of the world.

You who cannot willingly take up your cross and die to sin, die to sin by God's gracious and holy work in Baptism. You who cannot willingly pay the cost of discipleship and follow Jesus on your own, are placed on the path of righteousness and made disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit as He comes to you in God's Word.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of this, in *The Cost of Discipleship*: "The earthly form of Christ is the form that died on the cross. The image of God is the image of Christ crucified. It is to this image that the life of the disciples must be conformed; in other words, they must be conformed to his death (Phil 3.10, Rom 6.4) The Christian life is a life of crucifixion (Gal 2.19) In baptism the form of Christ's death is impressed upon his own. They are dead to the flesh and to sin, they are dead to the world, and the world is dead to them (Gal 6.14). Anybody living in the strength of Christ's baptism lives in the strength of Christ's death."

Conclusion

Christ alone has the proper resources to pay the cost of discipleship. That's why sermons at Immanuel aren't about you, or politics, or family relationships, or good living, or success in business—these things can't save you, and may very well come between you and Jesus. Instead,

we preach Christ crucified—He alone is the Disciple and the cross-bearer that we can never be. But because Jesus lives in you by the power of God, you are the cross-bearing disciple Jesus wants you to be!

Again, turning to the pages of *The Cost of Discipleship*, “The Christian must treat his enemy as a brother, and requite his hostility with love. His behavior must be determined not by the way others treat him, but by the treatment he himself receives from Jesus; it has only one source, and that is the will of Jesus.”

Or, to put it in the apostle Paul’s words, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” I can be a disciple of Jesus, take up my cross, through Christ who gives me strength.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.