

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

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Scripture: Luke 14:25-35

***"The Cost of Discipleship"***

**ONE OF THE HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS**

In our Gospel lesson from Luke we have one of the hard sayings of Jesus – hard in terms of understanding – Jesus said in **Jn. 14:26**, ***"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."***

Wait, that doesn't sound right, does it? (We'll get to that in a minute). But I submit it isn't just the statement Jesus is saying that is hard, it is the entire message of this passage! What I am talking about is what is commonly called the "Cost of Discipleship," that there is a great cost involved if one wants to follow Jesus Christ.

Now before we go any further, I want to put things in perspective for a moment. I want you to think about your life and life in general. If you want to accomplish anything of significance, it will cost, won't it? If you want to get ahead, it requires hard work – whether that be in academics, sports, industry, or any skill you are seeking to develop. It will require sacrifice – sacrifice of time, effort, and money. Any change that we want to see in our lives and in our world costs. It costs to gain our freedom and it costs to maintain our freedom. And in our relationships – think of marriage, child raising, and maintaining friendships, and family relationships – it takes work, it takes sacrifice. And why is that? Because true love involves sacrifice. How do you know how much someone loves you? By how much they are willing to sacrifice for another. Jesus said in **Jn 15:13**, ***"Greater love has no one than this, then one lay down his life for his friends."***

So really, what Jesus is talking about is nothing new in principle. For it is a general life principle – that growth in every area of life, growth – spiritual growth, mental growth, family growth, growth in loving relationships will cost us! The difference here, though, is the focus and intensity. What is the ultimate focus of life to be and what is the intensity involved?

**WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVATION FOR FOLLOWING JESUS?**

Now do you remember how the passage began? We are told in verse 25, that ***"large crowds were going along with Him."*** Literally thousands were following Jesus. But Jesus knew that most weren't following Him for the right reasons. Some were there to see another miracle; others heard that he could feed the multitudes, and still others expected Him to overthrow the Romans and establish the Kingdom of David.

Why need to ask the question – **why are we following Jesus?** – simply for what He can do for us? Or are we following Him to get to know Him and to see what we can do *for Him* in response to what He already does for us? God is concerned about what is in our hearts. What is our motivation for doing the things we do? Jesus wasn't impressed with the enthusiasm of the crowd; He wants to get to the heart of

the matter. Do they understand why Jesus is here and what does it mean to really follow Him? Jesus says if you want to follow Me, then that will mean being My disciple; and being My disciple will mean that certain things will be true about your life.

Now first, what is a disciple? A disciple is a learner, one who attaches himself or herself to a teacher in order to learn a trade or a subject. It is the most common name used for a follower of Christ – 264 times in the Gospels and Book of Acts to be exact! Notice in the English it is related to the word discipline. A disciple will be one who exhibits a disciplined order of life that reflects his or her teacher's teachings. But we will see when it comes to Jesus – it is more than learning a trade or subject matter. It involves life itself. We are to reflect not just the teachings of Jesus, but we are to reflect His very life. And with that backdrop we can now look in detail at this passage.

### **FOLLOWING JESUS IS MORE THAN JUST BELIEVING IN HIM**

Jesus begins by saying, **26***"If anyone comes to Me,"* **"If"** means that following Jesus is a choice. **"Anyone"** means that Jesus's invitation is open to all, and **"comes to Me"** means it is something we personally do with the One who made us! To follow Jesus is a choice that every individual will have sooner or later to be in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. But then Jesus adds something that undoubtedly gets everyone's attention. I am sure it got yours. Jesus says, ***"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."*** Ouch! Those are tough words.

To someone reading the Word for the first time or to the new believer, this may sound like a contradiction. Didn't Jesus say that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself? Doesn't the Bible teach that if you don't take care of your family you are worse than a pagan? And aren't we told in the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment to honor our father and mother? Of course. But Jesus is not contradicting Himself, for otherwise that would be contrary to the very nature of love. Jesus says such words for two reasons. First, He does so to get everyone's attention. To wake us up to how important His point is. And second, to show His point – that our love for God, our love for Jesus Christ must be far greater than anything else in this world including those whom we love the most as well as our life itself! (c.f., **Mt. 10:37-39**).

Following Jesus is a choice and following Jesus means loving God above everything in this life including our loved ones and our own selves! So the word "hate" does not mean that we hate others or ourselves; it simply means that in comparison to our love for the Lord there can be no comparison. And we will see the reason why in a moment.

Jesus continues. He says, **28***"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."* Now what did the cross represent to those who heard it? It referred to that disgraceful form of Roman execution called crucifixion. It represented death. So on the surface it means that we must be willing to die for Jesus. And that is the ultimate expression of love isn't it? Jesus said so in **John 15:13** (see above). But the implication here is that it is done on an ongoing basis. In fact, earlier in **Lk. 9:23**, Jesus says ***"whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily."*** We can't physically die daily can we? So it means something more. We must be willing to die in a spiritually

sense and that means we must be willing to surrender our wills to God's will when it hurts. When it is inconvenient. We must be willing to suffer for doing what is right, for being a follower of Jesus, and serve Him first, making sure that our ambitions and plans reflect His! Notice that Jesus does not say just "his cross." He says whoever does not carry his OWN cross. All of us will have our own crosses to bear. And they are those things that we accept that are part of God's will. It may be persecution, it may be a sickness, or it may be an unbelieving son or daughter. But it also means more than just things that cause suffering; it means the sacrifices involved in simply following the Lord.

For then Jesus gives us three parables. He says, **28***"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29***"***Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30***saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'** **31***"Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32***"***Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33***"***So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."* **34***Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? 35***"***It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Remember, following Jesus is going to cost us our time, our treasure, our talent and our effort. But lest we think in terms of just cost – no. With God everything that costs is really an investment. You have heard of the old adage it takes money to make money. Same principle. We see it here, don't we?

The builder takes money which took effort to earn, and he gives it up to buy the things he needs to build a tower that will provide him with practical benefits for a lifetime. The king who is wise won't go into battle unless he knows he not only has the troopers but they are ready for battle. And in that context there is no substitute for victory for victory leads to freedom. Terms of peace will lead to slavery.

What one gives up paves the way for a greater return, not necessarily first and foremost of material or natural blessing but of spiritual and relational blessing. To highlight this point, Jesus adds, **"So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."** Life is not about our stuff. It is about using the stuff of this world for God's glory to create eternal rewards.

### **ANOTHER TAKE ON THE PARABLES**

Many believe that Jesus' reference to the builder and the king refers to us as disciples. That like a builder and a king we need to count the cost. But there is also another way to look at it. You can also look at it as if Jesus is the builder and if Jesus is the king in these parables. That without effective disciples, without disciples willing to pay the price, Jesus will not be able to build the tower of His Kingdom or fight the war against evil. For then Jesus concludes by saying, **34***Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? 35***"***It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Who is supposed to be the salt? We are! His disciples! He said **"You are the salt of the earth"** in **Mt. 5:13**. Salt was valuable in the ancient world. In fact, part of a soldier's pay consisted of salt. In the

English salt and salary are related. It is why we have the saying, "He is not worth his salt." It was a preservative and retardant. True disciples will retard evil and preserve our world from total destruction. Salt is also a purifying agent – it cleans a wound. Only God's grace can cleanse us. It also makes things flavorful and people thirsty and is a catalyst. By our character and conduct we should be making people thirsty for Jesus. By our character and conduct we will be catalysts for God's work on earth. By our character and conduct people will know whether or not we are followers of Jesus.

I am reminded of the millions over the last 2000 years who have literally given their lives for Jesus Christ. I think of Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, and three other men who went to share the Gospel with the "Auca" tribe in Ecuador in 1956. They did everything they could to prepare the tribe to hear about Jesus but were met by lances and killed. Some thought their lives were wasted. But as news of their deaths spread throughout the world, some 1000 college students volunteered for mission work among the native tribes in South America. The number of converts among natives skyrocketed and the wives of Jim Elliot and Nate Saint met the members of the tribe, translated the Bible into their language and forgave their husband's killers – who, because their tribe had always been on a "war" footing, thought the men were going to harm them - even though when the tribesmen attacked, the men did not use their handgun in defense but simply shot the gun into the air. Later, when the natives heard the gospel and how Jesus gave His life for us, they made the connection! As a result, the entire tribe came to Christ and there is a strong Christian witness in that area of the world to the present day. They did not die in vain. Their sacrifice was worth it.

I think of Deitrich Bonhoffer, Lutheran pastor and author, who stood against Hitler's tyranny. In the early years of the war, he was encouraged by many to travel and stay in the USA but he chose to remain in Germany to stand against Hitler's evil. He wrote a book which has become a classic and is known throughout the world, entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*. In good conscience he could not abandon His people or church. He eventually went to the gallows for his opposition to Hitler.

Those were disciples who were worth their salt. But I also think of the millions who die to self daily every day so that they are the light and salt of Christ. I think of our own members here who do so as well. But I also know that it is something that indeed has to be done daily. In other words, we can't rest on our past victories or good works. Each day presents us with a new opportunity and frankly, times are tough spiritually. They are for our area, for our nation, and for the Church in general. The truth is we have work to do. Here at St. Bartholomew's we have recast our vision and our mission. And there will be ways for everyone to be a part. The work that is done here matters. It has eternal consequences. It will result in eternal rewards that will always be remembered. But it won't happen unless Jesus has builders and warriors who are willing to count the cost and be like Him.

Jesus did not sugarcoat what it meant to follow Him. He let the crowds know and He lets us know exactly what we are getting into. It's not going to be easy. It's not for everyone. But He does not expect of us what He has not already done for us. When He spoke those words, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. He was about to take up His cross physically and die for all mankind. The truth is the cost to following Jesus is great, but the cost is worth it. As Jim Elliot wrote before reaching out to the native tribes in Ecuador, "*No man is a fool who gives what He cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.*" In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!