

**Matthew 6:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

In the late 19th century John Wanamaker opened a store in Philadelphia. Within a few years... that enterprise had become one of the most successful businesses in the country – Wanamaker’s General Store. Operating his store... (however)... wasn’t Wanamaker’s only responsibility. He was also named Postmaster General of the United States... and he served as superintendent for what was then the largest Sunday school in the world at *Bethany Presbyterian Church*.

When someone asked him how he could hold all those positions at once... he explained. *“Early in life I read, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.’ The Sunday school is my business... all the rest are the things.”*

One evidence of Wanamaker’s desire to keep the Lord’s work first in his life was a specially constructed soundproof room in his store. Every day he spent 30 minutes there - praying and meditating upon God’s Word. He had his priorities straight! ... .. (Listen!)... if our passage today does not impress upon you that the Lord is to be the number one priority of our lives... then this sermon will be a waste of time. (But I am praying that it won’t be...)

Almost everyone wants the kingdom of God... the problem is few want it **first**. ... .. Your purpose in life is to put the Lord first in your life in every area and decision. ... He is to be first in our time and in our giving. ... As a Christian... your life does **not** belong to you. ... Sometimes a Christian will display an attitude of: *“It’s my life! Don’t tell me what to do!”* ... No... if you

are a follower of Christ - it is **not** your life. ... It belongs to the Lord and ONLY when we realize this and yield to this truth... will we begin to fulfill God's purpose for our lives.

**1 Corinthians 6:20 (ESV)**

*<sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

**1 Corinthians 7:23 (ESV)**

*<sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.*

(LISTEN!) ... because of His great love for us... we ought to willingly and easily put the Lord Jesus Christ first in our lives.

The passages that we have been studying in Luke chapter 14 over the past few weeks... have had the setting of a meal at a leader of the Pharisee's house. Last week Jesus made it clear that excuses will not work – if we deny God's invitation to join His kingdom. Today... as we continue... we will see that Jesus wants total commitment.

When Jesus left the Pharisee's house... great crowds followed Him... but He was not impressed by their enthusiasm. He knew that most of those in the crowd were not the least bit interested in **spiritual** things. Some wanted only to see miracles... (they were curious – just like those who love to watch a circus)... Others sought healing... or heard that He fed the hungry... and a few hoped He would overthrow Rome and establish David's promised kingdom. They were expecting TEMPORARY things.

Knowing that these people that were following Him had a weak caliber of commitment... Jesus began to make matters difficult for these folks by being up front with them... and telling them the difficulties of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus intended to impress on the people **their**

need to examine their resolve to follow Him. ... It will cost something to make a decision for Christ. It will cost something to be His disciple. He was on His way to die on the cross. ... .. Ultimately everyone **did** desert Him... when He was arrested and put on trial.

(LISTEN!) It **STILL** costs something to make a decision for Christ in our own day. It will ALWAYS cost something to be His disciple. (And) I believe that we have done a poor job today making clear (what Jesus is very clear about in our passage today.) *“Believe in Jesus...” “Pray this prayer...” “Good... that’s all you need to know and do. You’re good to go! You are a disciple. You’re in!”*... .. BUT that **isn’t** all we need to know.

Churches today try to make Christianity painless and easy... and the result is churches that are filled with nominal believers that are **unwilling** to sacrifice for the Lord and be dedicated to Him. There is an unwillingness to make any sacrifices.

SALVATION is free and easy. It is a free gift – we don’t have to work for it. We simply receive it. (THAT is our salvation!) We do a good job in explaining to others this free gift of salvation whenever we share the Gospel message. But I think that we have FAILED to make clear what **FOLLOWING** Jesus entails. You see Jesus saves us - to serve and follow Him. ... He wants to be first in our life – but we (evangelicals) make it seem OK to allow our possessions... pursuits... and other relationships to be FIRST. ... It isn’t.

### **Luke 14:25-26**

Jesus wanted his listeners to think. Jesus yanks us from our dreamworld.  
*“Do you fancy yourself a disciple? Do you think you are going to follow me?”*

*Well then you must love me so much that your love for your family seems like hatred in comparison! Hate your own life. Otherwise, don't pretend to be following me!" ... Jesus' words astonish us.*

What has bothered many people is the word **hate** which Jesus uses here. Does the Master really mean that a true disciple must dislike... detest... abhor... loathe his father and mother... wife and children... brothers and sisters? ... Literally hating one's family would have been a violation of the Law. ... Since Jesus (on several occasions) admonished others to fulfill the Law... He must not have meant here that one should literally hate his family. ... (You know) other Scripture tells us to love our family... and provide for them...

**1 Timothy 5:8 (ESV)**

*<sup>8</sup> But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

...So how do we interpret this word "hate" language? The stress here is on the priority of love. "It is the language of exaggerated contrast" (according to the foremost expert of the Greek language – A.T. Robertson). ... It is loving one **less**... not a show of malice or bitterness or wrath. ... Jesus was speaking against one of the excuses that we saw in last week's passage (in the verses just before this.) One man excused himself from the feast because "*I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come*" (Luke 14:20).

In order to interpret the Lord's words correctly... we need some familiarity with the ancient Near Eastern concept of "hate" (which is very different from our modern... Western use of the term.) ... In twenty-first-century America... hate is "intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from

fear... anger... or sense of injury; extreme dislike or antipathy.” ... In the ancient literature of Near Eastern cultures... hate is a matter of priorities.

For example... Esau “despised” (or “hated”) his birthright when he chose a bowl of soup over his covenant blessing (Gen. 25:29–34). Esau didn’t have intense negative emotions about his birthright — he certainly didn’t “hate” it as we would use the term — in fact... he fought hard to regain what he had lost and was inconsolable when he failed.

In another example... Genesis 29 tells the story of Jacob’s two wives and how he “loved” Rachel and “hated” her sister (Leah.) ... Again... the term indicates Jacob’s choice to favor one over the other. ... He couldn’t have been too repulsed by Leah. He did (after all) conceive seven children with her! ... The issue is choice or priority - irrespective of one’s feelings.

These verses are simply saying that we should put God first. A believer’s devotedness to Jesus Christ should be such that... by comparison... it looks as if everything else is hated. ... Love for one’s own flesh and blood is proper and commendable. The Lord is not depreciating that love. But if natural love and home ties come between a man and Christ... he must reevaluate his love.

Our love for Christ must be so strong that it overrules all other loves. ...

This is exactly where so many of us fall short. Some of us love our spouses and children more than we love God. ... We miss the mark when we put their athletic events... scholastic pursuits... cultural and artistic development... and socializing before their spiritual well-being. ... (I’m sorry if you think I am being too blunt – but I believe with all my heart that this is the exact message Jesus is saying to us.) ... We fall short as Jesus’

disciples... when we spend **more time** in the car shuttling them to games and lessons... (in just one day) than we do in a month - praying for their souls... and helping them understand Scripture. By comparison... our lives reveal that we are very **poor** disciples of Jesus.

**Matthew 6:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

Furthermore... to become a disciple of Christ... a person must love the Lord **more** than he loves himself. Jesus calls us to make a clear... definable... decisive choice to make Him our number one priority over all other relationships... including love for self.

**Luke 14:27**

Jesus tightens the screws on this crowd. You cannot be MY disciple if you do not “*bear your cross and come after Me.*” ... He is testing their caliber of commitment by addressing the issue of “**our** cross.”

The cross is an instrument of execution. He is saying in effect, “He who does not hoist up his gallows or his electric chair and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Discipleship is a series of deaths—perpetual dying. Disciples follow Christ on a path of self-denial.

When the Romans executed a prisoner by crucifixion... they made the entire process as humiliating as it was excruciating. ... After stripping the victim naked for flogging... they hung a sign around their neck listing their crimes. The victim was then forced to carry the implement of their own death through the city streets to the place of execution. Therefore... to “carry one’s own cross” is to bear the public scorn of discipleship and to

accept the inevitable suffering it brings. It means daily identification with Christ in shame... suffering... and surrender to God's will. ... It means death to self... to our own plans and ambitions... and a willingness to serve Him as He directs. A "cross" is something we willingly accept from God as part of His will for our lives.

Note the phrase "*and come after Me.*" It expresses the idea of getting in line behind someone. In the same manner the masses followed Jesus on His way to Jerusalem... true disciples place their feet in His footsteps — all the way up to Golgotha... the place of crucifixion. The Lord's call includes a commitment to the kingdom cause that's as selfless and complete as His Own. The truly committed follower releases their own will while embracing the Father's will.

Dallas Seminary Professor (Darrell Bock) says: "*Following Jesus is no invitation to an ice-cream social.*"

The disciple's life is not easy. C. S Lewis had it right:

*The Christian way is different.... Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit."*

Discipleship requires everything. There are no exceptions. No one has ever become a disciple of Christ and lived a life of ease! ... You can search the writings of the apostolic church and you will find no exception. ... You can check every writing and personal vignette during the first 400 years of the church and you will find no disciple lounging on a bed of constant comfort.

The same is true of the Dark Ages and the Renaissance and the Reformation and the 500 years of intervening history. Discipleship in every age (including our own) calls for **sacrifice**.

Jesus offered two analogies to illustrate conscious (eyes-wide-open) commitment. Both depict people making all-or-nothing decisions before proceeding. Jesus didn't want foolhardy promises; fickle disciples do more harm than good to the cause. No... He wants only those who take on the hardships with a reasonable understanding of the cost.

Enduring **shame** of the cross is **one** of the costs. But there is **also** shame to be had... when we don't first consider the cost.

### **Luke 14:28-32**

If you want to be a disciple of Christ... then you must count the cost of being a disciple with the goal of finishing what God has led you to do. God wants us to finish ... .. and finish our course well. Paul said: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7)." Paul stressed repeatedly the importance of **finishing** for the Lord.

#### **Acts 20:24 (ESV)**

*<sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*

#### **1 Corinthians 9:24 (ESV)**

*<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.*

#### **Philippians 3:13-14 (ESV)**

*<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*



Using two illustrations... Jesus then taught that discipleship must include planning and sacrifice. Being a disciple is costly. It calls for serious and deliberate thought. The Lord does not want any impulsive response to His invitation. Jesus' followers must be sure they are willing to pay the full price of discipleship.

Before a person decides to be a follower of Jesus... he/she needs to realize that being a Christian will not be a “*bed of roses*.” ... Many people have “*made a decision for Christ*” without any expectation that they would have their own cross of shame and difficulty to bear. They “*cast their lot with Christ*” – but then fall away at the first sign of trouble. (It isn't that they lost their salvation. I don't think that these ever had a saving faith.)

Others (who do count the cost) and realize that challenges lay ahead... are tempted to think: “*Perhaps I can remain neutral. In order to avoid trouble and hardship... I will believe in Jesus... but not be a committed disciple...*” To those who think this way... Jesus told the second parable. The first was about building a tower. The builder had a choice – to build it or not. The second parable was about a King who was about to be attacked. He did not have a choice about being attacked or not.

The second parable announced: “*No, you cannot remain neutral. If you are a believer... you must evaluate and decisively act...*” Someone was coming against the King with 20,000 soldiers... and he only had 10,000. He MUST make a decision. (Against those odds – outnumbered 2 to 1 - it would probably be wise for him to send a delegation and make peace with the attacker.)

The illustration is excellent. In Romans chapter one we read that God is storing up His wrath for sinful mankind. It is like a dam that is about ready to break... and spill out over all the earth – just as the Book of Revelation describes. God’s overwhelming wrath ***is*** coming!

Neutrality is impossible. What (then) should the King (or us) do? ... You can try to withstand all of God’s coming wrath... in your own strength... ***OR*** you can become reconciled with God. ... That is the wise... sensible... reasonable thing to do. (Join God’s kingdom. Become a disciple of Jesus! The alternative is unthinkable.)

So the first parable is a picture of a person first coming to Christ. The second parable deals with following after Him. In the first one... we see the need to consider the cost of discipleship. In the second parable... we are to consider what refusing the “more powerful One” will mean. Can you enter the battle against Him? Don’t you see that there are FAR greater benefits in allying with God’s Kingdom?

This is exactly what we have seen Jesus urging people to do – (recently) here in Luke’s Gospel.

**Luke 12:57-59 (ESV)**

*<sup>57</sup> “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? <sup>58</sup> As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. <sup>59</sup> I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”*

**Luke 13:3 (ESV)**

*<sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*

**Luke 13:5 (ESV)**

*<sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

**Luke 13:24 (ESV)**

*<sup>24</sup> “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*

**Luke 13:34 (ESV)**

*<sup>34</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*

The failure to consider the cost and sacrifice of discipleship can result in great defeat and shame. These similitudes were not intended to **discourage** discipleship but to encourage sincerity and sacrifice in discipleship.

**Luke 14:33**

Discipleship is more than “hating” family or bearing a cross: one must also distance oneself from materialistic attachment to the world. ... A disciple’s attachments are potentially the most destructive thing for discipleship. ...

The will to renounce all possessions and to ally oneself totally to Jesus is the essence of discipleship. Jesus is first. He is the one object of focus.

Persevering with Jesus means being attached to him... not to possessions.

God may want us to give up all our possessions. All are called **to be prepared for it** although **it will not be a reality for all**. We will not really be an effective... worthy disciple... without this attitude of willingness (if God should ask us.)

The point here is to avoid an emotional attachment to money or possessions. ... Again, it's a matter of priorities. ... In the realm of EVERYTHING... Christ comes first. ... In terms of your possessions... commit them to God's service... whether they remain in your possession or not. ... Disciples must let no *thing* possess them. Hold everything loosely.

“Health and wealth” (“word of faith”) **hucksters** love to camp out on this verse. ... Of course... they want to have everyone sell their possessions for cash and send it in to **them!** ... But that's not what Jesus had in mind. We have to interpret this teaching in conjunction with this verse's context.

Jesus says every would-be disciple must count the cost before he enters discipleship. And what is the cost? Every possession he has and everything he is—every corner of his life!

Jesus has been emphasizing that His followers must be wholeheartedly devoted to Him. They must not be merely nominal disciples. They should be genuine salt- salt that has not lost its flavor.

### **Luke 14:34-35**

The idea that salt could lose its saltiness is absurd. Salt cannot change its defining quality without changing its molecules to become something else. Salt, sodium chloride, is a stable compound. Technically it cannot lose its saltiness. But it can be diluted when mixed with impurities... thus losing its saltiness.

Jesus used this illustration of impossibility to make two points. First... the kingdom doesn't need useless disciples any more than a household needs to stockpile a useless substance. ... Second... disciples who do not possess the essential qualities Jesus just described are (by definition) not

disciples. They are something else. ... Therefore... people who do not possess these qualities should seriously question their status as disciples; or - if they have committed themselves to true discipleship... then they should rise to the occasion.

There have been times that I have gone to my tool box or storage drawer to get an item that I needed to perform a task that needed to be done... but because of time or wear... the tool was useless and good for nothing. Many times I have purchased glue or caulk and used them on projects. When finished I would screw on the cap to prevent drying only to find a year later... I can't get the cap off or somehow the glue or caulk dried. At one time it was good for something... but now it was good for nothing. I have found that good paint can be rendered good for nothing if it freezes in your garage. The chemicals break down under freezing temperatures... rendering the paint as useless.

Salt is good... and we are to be good (too.) Christians are the salt of the earth. The word "are" indicates that Christ is concerned about what we are... our being. When what we ARE is right... then what we DO will be right. ... When we are genuine followers and disciples of Christ... we are like "good salt." Christians are the salt of the earth. ... Saline saints bring zest and gusto to life. Like salt... they bring out the best of the flavor of living. ... May the Lord deliver us from being useless Christians!

I will close now in a way that I frequently do. I find so much wisdom and inspiration in the sermons and writings of Chuck Swindoll. He has such a way of expressing what needs to be said in such an impactful manner. He writes:

We should aim high. Our problem is not that we are over-challenged; it's that we're under-challenged. If you will permit me, I need to be forthright with a couple of statements. They don't apply to everyone at all times, so I'll leave it to you to decide whether they apply to you. First, *stop indulging your laziness*.

Start getting involved with children or teenagers or the aged. Volunteer for services at the church that you attend. If your church doesn't have something for you to do (which I highly doubt), then your community needs you. God didn't call you into His family to serve yourself or to sit on the sidelines. Dust off your rear end and get going!

Second, *start demonstrating your devotion*.

Don't write about it. Don't sing about it. Don't read about how to do it. Do it! Give generously to ministries or causes you respect. Give until it hurts, and then give until it starts feeling good again—and it will. Devote your time and energy to helping someone in need.

You are either a loyal disciple of Christ or you are a lost sinner. You are one or the other—there's no middle category. So, if you're not a lost sinner, then it's time to aim high and become what you are.

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