

LUKE 14:25-35

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Jerry Truex
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Today we continue our journey with Jesus. As you recall, Luke presents Jesus walking from Galilee to Jerusalem. Of course, Jerusalem is Jesus' final destiny. There he will confront the religious and political power elites, who crucify him. But crucifixion leads to resurrection and Jesus' return to God.

Throughout the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus invites his disciples, including the readers, to learn what it means to walk with him on route to crucifixion, resurrection, and return to God.

The passage we read today is centers on one key point: *Discipleship requires Christ to be the highest priority of our lives.*

A. Traveling with Jesus (25)

<p>²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them,</p>	<p>²⁵ Συνεπορεύοντο δὲ αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοί, καὶ στραφεὶς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς·</p>
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Notice that Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem and large crowds are following him.

So, in what follows, Jesus will speak to the crowds, to potential disciples, who wonder whether he is the Christ. In this context, Jesus doesn't pull his punches about what is required for every disciple.

B. Two sayings (26-32)

1. Hating one's family

<p>²⁶ "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes,</p>	<p>²⁶ εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τοὺς</p>
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and even life itself [or "his own life"],
cannot be my disciple.

ἀδελφούς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς ἔτι τε καὶ
τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ, οὐ δύναται εἶναί
μου μαθητής.

a. Come to Jesus

Notice that the phrase, "whoever comes to me," is synonymous with "being my disciple" (26). Coming to Jesus is being his disciple.

The phrase, "coming to Jesus," is in the present tense. So it means "whoever continues" to come to Jesus. It is an ongoing process, a continuous journey. "We are always on the road with God."¹

Why is coming to Jesus so important? Because God is present in Jesus. The Universal Mind and Heart is manifest in and through Christ. Coming to Jesus is, therefore, salvation. Christ—the Cosmic Christ—mediates wholeness, healing, and social harmony.

What does Jesus say? Jesus gives three requirements of discipleship. Discipleship is a tough road to walk. Discipleship is not "easy believism".

b. Semitic idiom

The first requirement of discipleship or "coming to Jesus" involves "hating" one's family, even "life itself". Now that is likely to cause some anxiety for many people.

One thing is clear. We cannot interpret this verse literally. Jesus is not recommending *intense hostility* toward our family or our own selves. After all, Jesus summarized all of God's commandments as loving God and loving one's neighbor (10:27-28).

The fact is Jesus is using a Semitic idiom. The word, "Semitic," refers to something that comes from the Middle East.² The word, "idiom," refers to an expression that cannot be literally translated word-for-word.

Here are some English idioms:

- "Against the clock" – Rushed and short on time.
- "A piece of cake" – A task that can be accomplished very easily.
- "Bite your tongue" – Avoid talking.

¹ Bock, *Luke* (1996) 403.

² Relating to a subfamily of Afro-Asiatic language family that includes Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Amharic.

- "Drink like a fish" – To drink heavily.
- "Drive someone up the wall" – To irritate or annoy someone.
- "Give me a hand" – Help.
- "Hold your horses" – Wait.

If we translated these idioms word-for-word into another language there would be some serious misunderstanding!

Jesus used idioms. That is what we find in verse 26. The word, "hate," means "loving less than".³

Gen. 29:30-31. So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. (RSV)

In contrast to Luke's literal translation of Jesus' saying, Matthew gave a "thought-for-thought" translation in Matt 10:37.

Matt. 10:37. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (NRSV)

Jesus is saying that his followers are "to love/obey him more than anyone else, even their own families."⁴ Being Jesus' disciple means giving primary allegiance to Jesus.

c. Christ relativizes relationships

This means that "following Jesus" involves *relativizing relationships*. By that I mean that relationships and social conventions are not seen as absolute (not ends) in themselves, but are related to something higher and prior to them, namely, God.

I think Jesus saw that family structures—or any social structures and their conventions for that matter—"can hold one in bondage and prevent responding to the message of centering in God."⁵

³ Nolland, *Luke*, Vol 2 (1993) 762; Stein, *Luke* (1992) 396. See Deut 21:15-17 and Luke 16:13.

⁴ Stein, *Luke* (1992) 396.

⁵ Born, *Jesus* (2006) 207.

Any social structure—family or otherwise—can create expectations and values that undermine our connection to God and our True Self.

For example, our society tells us that having more-and-more possessions, pleasure, power, entertainment, and status is a fulfilled life. In this system, we are invited to find fulfillment in possessions, pleasure, and power instead of God. We develop a false self that thinks we are what we do (profession), what we have (possessions), and what others think of us (persona).

And yet, we know that the pursuit of such things is endless and never satisfying, and is also the source of addictions, anxiety, conflict, and violence.

The point is this: Loyalty to the God of Jesus Christ must be prior to all relationships, including one's family, tribe, ethnic group, political party, religious organization, country, gender, and race.

2. Carrying the cross

Next, we hear the second requirement.

<p>²⁷ <i>Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.</i></p>	<p>²⁷ ὅστις οὐ βαστάζει τὸν σταυρὸν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἔρχεται ὀπίσω μου, οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής.</p>
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Carrying the cross refers to the Roman custom of requiring the condemned criminal to carry the cross-bar to the place of execution.⁶

Luke uses the symbol of the cross as a lens to interpret the disciple's whole existence.

Disciples live cruciformed existence.

"Now 'to follow him' is not just a Jewish way of talking about being a disciple of a master, but a challenge to have one's whole existence determined by and patterned after a crucified messiah."⁷

C. Two parables (28-32)

⁶ The Greek historian, Plutarch (AD 46-120) wrote: "Every criminal who is executed carries his own cross."Nolland, *Luke*, Vol 2 (1993) 482.

⁷ Nolland, *Luke*, Vo. 2 (1993) 482.

Next, Jesus presents two parables that “emphasize the need for serious and sober reflection on this commitment” to Jesus.⁸

1. The tower builder (28-30)

<p>²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'</p>	<p>²⁸ Τίς γὰρ ἐξ ὑμῶν θέλων πύργον οἰκοδομῆσαι οὐχὶ Πρῶτον καθίσας ψηφίζει τὴν δαπάνην, εἰ ἔχει εἰς ἀπαρτισμόν; ²⁹ Ἴνα μήποτε θέντος αὐτοῦ θεμέλιον καὶ μὴ ἰσχύοντος ἐκτελέσαι πάντες οἱ θεωροῦντες ἄρξωνται αὐτῷ ἐμπαίζειν ³⁰ λέγοντες ὅτι οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἤρξατο οἰκοδομεῖν καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν ἐκτελέσαι.</p>
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The Parable of the Tower Builder suggests that following Jesus has a “cost” and one must be willing to “pay” it.

Every disciple who wants to be a *tower that endures* must consider the cost to be paid in renunciation, self-discipline, and cross bearing.

2. The king going to war (31-32)

<p>³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.</p>	<p>³¹ Ἡ τίς βασιλεὺς πορευόμενος ἐτέρῳ βασιλεῖ συμβαλεῖν εἰς πόλεμον οὐχὶ καθίσας πρῶτον βουλευσεται εἰ δυνατός ἐστιν ἐν δέκα χιλιάσιν ὑπαντῆσαι τῷ μετὰ εἴκοσι χιλιάδων ἐρχομένῳ ἐπ' αὐτόν; ³² εἰ δὲ μή γε, ἔτι αὐτοῦ πόρρω ὄντος πρεσβεῖαν ἀποστείλας ἐρωτᾷ τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην.</p>
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The Parable of the King Going to War reinforces the first parable. Discipleship requires serious assessment and serious commitment.

⁸ Stein, *Luke* (1992) 396.

Every disciple who wants to retain the *kingdom of his or her soul* must develop the wisdom and strength to deal with opposition that would destroy the soul.

Notice that both parables do not invite a hasty, emotional decision for Jesus! Jesus does not say, "When your emotions overwhelm you, run up to the altar and commit your life to me." Jesus wants his followers to "contemplate the cost" (14:28; cf. 9:57-62).

Contemplating the cost strengthens the commitment.

D. Giving up all possessions (33)

Next, we hear the third requirement for followers of Jesus.

³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

³³ οὕτως οὖν πᾶς ἐξ ὑμῶν ὃς οὐκ ἀποτάσσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής.

The verb, "give up" or "renounce" (*apotassetai*) is in the present tense, so it emphasizes that the renunciation must be continual.

It is difficult to know whether Luke is expecting disciples:

- To literally give up everything (Lk 5:11, 28; 18:28) or
- To have an attitude of nonattachment (Acts 2:44; 4:32)

An attachment—anything we are unwilling to give up—is a compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that controls us. To be nonattached to possessions—even though we might have possessions—means being willing to give them up as the Lord leads us.

I think Luke is emphasizing being nonattached to possessions because of the "continual renouncing" that verse 33 stresses. Continual renouncing sounds like an attitude rather than an event.

In this way, "giving up" everything means recognizing that God has claim on everything I own and, more than that, everything that I am as well.

E. A parabolic warning (34-35)

<p>³⁴ "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"</p>	<p>³⁴ Καλὸν οὖν τὸ ἅλας· ἐὰν δὲ καὶ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῆ, ἐν τίνι ἀρτυθήσεται; ³⁵ οὔτε εἰς γῆν οὔτε εἰς κοπρίαν εὐθετόν ἐστιν, ἔξω βάλλουσιν αὐτό. ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω.</p>
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The phrase, "loses its saltiness" is literally, "becomes foolish" (*mōranthē*)—where we get the English word, "moron". So Jesus is talking about "salt becoming foolish or moronic." That kind of salt becomes worthless! Worse than nothing.

For example, suppose you buy a fire extinguisher. You believe you are prepared in case of fire. But what you don't know is that the fire extinguisher doesn't work. It is a faulty fire extinguisher. In Jesus' lingo, it is a "foolish fire extinguisher". It gives you a sense of false security. And when you need it, it doesn't work. It's worse than nothing!

Jesus uses the analogy of salt losing its saltiness to talk about Christians who have lost what is essential. This parable suggests it is possible for disciples to fail.

When Christians have confused loyalties, when they place anything above Christ—whether family, tribe, ethnic group, political party, country, gender, race, self, or possessions—they lose their inner integrity, they fragment, fall apart, lose their saltiness, and become "foolish".

F. Reflections

1. Following Jesus has three requirements

- a. **Hating one's family**; loyalty to Christ must be prior to family, ethnic group, race, gender, political party, and country (26).
- b. **Carrying the cross**; loyalty to Christ is cruciform existence (27).
- c. **Giving up all possessions**; loyalty to Christ involves freedom from attachments (33).

2. Following Jesus is conscious and continuous

The decision to follow Jesus is made consciously and continuously.

3. Following Jesus is costly

If we claim to be Christians, we are saying we have counted the cost and chosen to accept the way of Christ, which is neither easy nor cheap.