

Luke 14:25-35
January 26, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Can a person accept Christ's salvation and yet not follow Him as Lord? [Let people engage – It's possible for Christians to follow Jesus superficially]

Transition: There are many in evangelical circles who draw a sharp distinction between salvation and discipleship. Salvation, they say, is God's free gift, but discipleship is costly. They would also say that while every believer *ought* to pursue discipleship, it is not linked to saving faith. In other words, there are some who are truly saved, but who never commit themselves to being disciples. They say that it is possible to receive Jesus as Savior, but not to follow Him as Lord. But is that true? Let's read and find out.

BOOK:

The Cost of Being a Disciple

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them, he said: ²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate (“to love less”) his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. **[He puts it in these terms for shock value, to get us to stop and think about the stringent demand that He is making. He means that our allegiance and love for Him must be so great that by comparison our love for our families and even for our own lives looks like hatred.]**²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. **[The cross was an implement of slow, tortuous death. Jesus here is looking at the process of daily death to selfish desires and of the willingness to bear reproach for His name's sake. Since our Savior suffered the rejection and agony of the cross, if we follow after Him, we must be prepared for the same treatment.]**

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. **[I believe that Jesus is getting at the fact that there are two possible lords that we can serve and the two are exclusive: God or Mammon.]**

³⁴ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- It's a call to self-denial, not self-fulfillment

- Jesus clearly establishes the standards of discipleship
- Jesus wants us to know what we're getting into when we say "yes" to Jesus
- There's no Christianity "light" in this text
- Jesus demands the supreme position above every area of our life

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

- It's sobering: Jesus says, "You cannot be My disciples!" Why? Because they will not forsake all for Him, bear shame and reproach for Him, and let their love for Him control them"

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Salvation is absolutely free, but once you receive it, it costs you everything. To truly follow Christ, we must consider the cost and put Him above everything else. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 231-233). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Multitudes: False Expectancy (Luke 14:25–35)

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, others heard that He fed the hungry, and a few hoped He would overthrow Rome and establish David's promised kingdom. They were expecting the wrong things.

Jesus turned to the multitude and preached a sermon that deliberately thinned out the ranks. He made it clear that, when it comes to personal discipleship, He is more interested in *quality* than *quantity*. In the matter of saving lost souls, He wants His house to be filled (Luke 14:23); but in the matter of personal discipleship, He wants only those who are willing to pay the price.

A "disciple" is a learner, one who attaches himself or herself to a teacher in order to learn a trade or a subject. Perhaps our nearest modern equivalent is "apprentice," one who learns by watching and by doing. The word *disciple* was the most common name for the followers of Jesus Christ and is used 264 times in the Gospels and the Book of Acts.

Jesus seems to make a distinction between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is open to all who will come by faith, while discipleship is for believers willing to pay a price. Salvation means coming to the cross and trusting Jesus Christ, while discipleship means carrying the cross and following Jesus Christ. Jesus wants as many sinners saved as possible ("that My house may be filled"), but He cautions us not to take discipleship lightly; and in the three parables He gave, He made it clear that there is a price to pay.

To begin with, we must love Christ supremely, even more than we love our own flesh and blood (Luke 14:26–27). The word *hate* does not suggest positive antagonism but rather "to love less" (see Gen. 29:30–31; Mal. 1:2–3; and Matt. 10:37). Our love for Christ must be so strong that all other love is like hatred in comparison. In fact, we must hate our own lives and be willing to bear the cross after Him.

What does it mean to "carry the cross"? 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 (John 12:23–28). A "cross" is something we willingly accept from God as part of His will for our lives. The Christian who called his noisy neighbors the "cross" he had to bear certainly did not understand the meaning of dying to self.

Jesus gave three parables to explain why He makes such costly demands on His followers: the man building a tower, the king fighting a war, and the salt losing its flavor. The usual interpretation is that believers are represented by the man building the tower and the king fighting the war, and we had better "count the cost" before we start, lest we start and not be able to finish. But I agree with Campbell Morgan that the builder and the king represent not the believer but Jesus Christ. *He is the One who must "count the cost" to see whether we are the kind of material He can use to build the church and battle the enemy.* He cannot get the job done with halfhearted followers who will not pay the price.

As I write this chapter, I can look up and see on my library shelves hundreds of volumes of Christian biographies and autobiographies, the stories of godly men and women who made great contributions to the building of the church and the battle against the enemy. They were willing to

pay the price, and God blessed them and used them. They were people with “salt” in their character.

Jesus had already told His disciples that they were “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). When the sinner trusts Jesus Christ as Savior, a miracle takes place and “clay” is turned into “salt.” Salt was a valued item in that day; in fact, part of a soldier’s pay was given in salt. (The words *salt* and *salary* are related; hence, the saying, “He’s not worth his salt.”)

Salt is a preservative, and God’s people in this world are helping to retard the growth of evil and decay. Salt is also a purifying agent, an antiseptic that makes things cleaner. It may sting when it touches the wound, but it helps to kill infection. Salt gives flavor to things and, most of all, makes people thirsty. By our character and conduct, we ought to make others thirsty for the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that He alone can give.

Our modern salt is pure and does not lose its flavor, but the salt in Jesus’ day was impure and could lose its flavor, especially if it came in contact with earth. Once the saltiness was gone, there was no way to restore it, and the salt was thrown out into the street to be walked on. When a disciple loses his Christian character, he is “good for nothing” and will eventually be “walked on” by others and bring disgrace to Christ.

Discipleship is serious business. If we are not true disciples, then Jesus cannot build the tower and fight the war. “There is always an *if* in connection with discipleship,” wrote Oswald Chambers, “and it implies that we need not [be disciples] unless we like. There is never any compulsion; Jesus does not coerce us. There is only one way of being a disciple, and that is by being devoted to Jesus.”

If we tell Jesus that we want to take up our cross and follow Him as His disciples, then He wants us to know exactly what we are getting into. He wants no false expectancy, no illusions, no bargains. He wants to use us as stones for building His church, soldiers for battling His enemies, and salt for bettering His world; *and He is looking for quality.*

After all, He was on His way to Jerusalem when He spoke these words, and look what happened to Him there! He does not ask us to do anything for Him that He has not already done for us.

To some, Jesus says, “You cannot be My disciples!” Why? Because they will not forsake all for Him, bear shame and reproach for Him, and let their love for Him control them.

And they are the losers.

Will *you* be His disciple?

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 243-244)

c. Jesus’ warning against thoughtless discipleship (14:25–35).

14:25–27. The setting then changed: **large crowds were traveling with Jesus.** Jesus intended to impress on the people their need to examine their resolve to follow Him. He was on His way to die on the cross. Ultimately everyone did desert Him when He was alone in the garden and then arrested and put on trial.

To emphasize that discipleship is difficult, Jesus said that one must **hate his** own family and **even his own life** in order to **be His disciple**. 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. The stress here is on the priority of love (cf. Matt. 10:37). One’s loyalty to Jesus must come before his loyalty to his

family or even to life itself. Indeed, those who did follow Jesus against their families' desires were probably thought of as hating their families.

The second difficult qualification Jesus stressed was that one must **carry his** (i.e., his own) **cross and follow** Jesus (Luke 14:27; cf. 9:23). When the Roman Empire crucified a criminal or captive, the victim was often forced to carry his cross part of the way to the crucifixion site. Carrying his cross through the heart of the city was supposed to be a tacit admission that the Roman Empire was correct in the sentence of death imposed on him, an admission that Rome was right and he was wrong. So when Jesus enjoined His followers to carry their crosses and follow Him, He was referring to a public display before others that Jesus was right and that the disciples were following Him even to their deaths. This is exactly what the religious leaders refused to do.

14:28–33. Using two illustrations, Jesus then taught that discipleship must include planning and sacrifice. The first illustration concerned **a tower** (vv. 28–30). Before a person begins **to build**, he should be sure he will be able to pay the full **cost** of the project. Jesus' followers must also be sure they are willing to pay the full price of discipleship.

The second illustration concerned **a king** who went out to battle. The king should be willing to sacrifice a desired victory if he senses he is unable to win. This principle of sacrifice is also important in the realm of discipleship: one must be willing to **give up everything** for Jesus. The people who were following Jesus throughout the countryside of Israel had done that. They had given up possessions and employment, knowing that the message Jesus was proclaiming was the most important thing on earth.

14:34–35. Jesus climaxed His teaching on discipleship by proclaiming that **salt is good** only as long as it contains the characteristics of saltiness. If **it loses its saltiness**, it has no value at all and **is thrown out**. The same is true of disciples. They must contain the characteristics of discipleship—planning and willing sacrifice—or they are of no value at all.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1544-1545). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

14:26 See notes on Mk 3:31–35 and Lk 9:60–61. Jesus' point is not that all who follow Him must sever all family relations (cp. 1 Tm 5:8) but rather that nothing, not even family, should be allowed to keep one from discipleship. The statement was intentionally shocking to drive the point home (see Mt 10:37).

14:28–32 Salvation is completely free, but it will cost your life.

14:33 For more on Jesus' teachings on possessions, see notes on 12:22–34 and Mk 10:21.

14:34–35 For more on Jesus' use of the image of salt, see note on Mk 9:50.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Lk 14:25-35). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

14:26 and does not hate Jesus is using hyperbole—a figure of speech that relies on exaggeration to make a point. He is not encouraging His followers to turn against their family members; rather, He is explaining that even devotion to family does not supersede the call to discipleship. Jesus and God's kingdom must come first in the life of a believer. Compare Matt 10:37 and note.

14:27 carry his own cross With death awaiting Him in Jerusalem, Jesus wants His disciples to understand that they may be subject to the same fate. See Matt 10:38 and note.

14:28 calculate the cost Jesus encourages His followers—as well as those in the crowd of pilgrims who had not yet become His disciples—to consider the great sacrifices involved in their decision. This section is unique to Luke’s travel narrative.

14:33 who does not renounce all Jesus sees an abundance of possessions as a hindrance to faith. He instructs His followers to rid themselves of anything that prevents a total commitment to God’s kingdom (see note on Matt 19:21). For many this meant selling everything they had for the betterment of the impoverished and for the sake of spreading the news about Jesus. This is seen in a tangible way in the lives of Jesus’ earliest followers (e.g., Acts 2:42–47).

14:34 salt Salt was used as a preservative and for flavoring (compare Matt 5:13 and note).

14:35 neither for the soil Even tasteless salt could be harmful to soil in large quantities.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 395-399). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

After the parable of the great banquet, which emphasizes the presence of God’s kingdom and the need to respond to its coming, Luke related a number of Jesus’ teachings that describe the conditions for membership. He did so in order to avoid possible misinterpretation of the parable. (Cf. Matt 22:11–14, in which the conditions for attendance at the messianic banquet follow the parable in 22:1–10.) In this passage Luke gave Jesus’ answer to the question “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Salvation (Luke 7:50), being a disciple (14:26), entering God’s kingdom (18:24), having eternal life (18:18), eating bread in God’s kingdom (14:15), being acknowledged before God’s angels (12:8), and following Jesus (14:26) are different ways Luke expressed the same reality. After the introduction (14:25), there are two parallel sayings describing the cost of discipleship (14:26–27; cf. Matt 10:37–38), two parabolic illustrations found only in Luke (14:28–30, 31–32), a third saying on the cost of discipleship (14:33), and a parabolic conclusion (14:34–35; cf. Matt 5:13). This theme, the cost of discipleship, is also found in Luke 9:23–27, 57–62; 18:24–30.

Following Jesus involves “hating” one’s family and even one’s life (14:26). Over the centuries this verse has caused great despair and confusion. Clearly Jesus, who summarized all God’s commandments as loving God and one’s neighbor (10:27–28), could not here have been demanding blind, raging hatred of one’s family. The confusion is due to Jesus’ use of a Semitic idiom. To love one person more than another is described in OT language as “loving one and hating another” (cf. Gen 29:30–31, RSV). In contrast to Luke’s “word-for-word” translation of Jesus’ words, Matthew gave a “thought-for-thought” translation in Matt 10:37, revealing that Jesus’ demand is for his followers to love/obey him more than anyone else, even their own families. Being Jesus’ disciple entails primary allegiance to Jesus. No one and no thing can usurp his supreme position. Even as God is to be loved supremely, with no other god or thing taking priority over him, so too Jesus takes priority even over family. The absolute nature of this demand should not be overlooked. This demand is further described by the illustration of a commitment even to martyrdom, i.e., the cross (Luke 14:27).

In 14:28–32 two similitudes emphasize the need for serious and sober reflection on this commitment. Jesus does not solicit a hasty, emotional decision. Instead, he urges those who would follow him to think seriously, to “count the cost” (14:28; cf. 9:57–62). Perseverance (8:15; 21:19) will result only after sober consideration of the cost of following Jesus. The section concludes with another condition of discipleship. Along with willingness to place him above family and life, Jesus also calls his followers to surrender their possessions (14:33).

At this point Luke added a somewhat enigmatic analogy concerning salt, which is found at a different place in Matthew (Matt 5:13; cf. Mark 9:50). Coming after the two similitudes dealing with counting the cost of following Jesus, this saying is meant to remind Theophilus that Jesus’ disciples must continue to be the “salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13). If the above three characteristics of discipleship (Luke 14:26–27, 33) fade away, they, like “unsalty” salt, will be worse than useless (cf. Rev 3:15–17; Heb 6:1–8).

Comments

14:25 Large crowds. Luke pointed out that the people were still attracted to Jesus. The conditions of discipleship that follow were not addressed to believers in order to make them apostles but to the crowds. They are therefore conditions for salvation, not conditions for Christians to become a spiritual elite or to reach a new level in their Christian lives.

Were traveling with Jesus. This recalls the journey to Jerusalem begun in Luke 9:51.

14:26 If anyone comes to me. “Comes to me” means *seeks salvation* or *makes a decision to follow Jesus* (cf. 18:26, 28).

And does not. The decision to follow Jesus must be accompanied by three conditions (14:26–27, 33).

Hate. This is the first condition. From Matt 10:37 we know that this means to “love [one’s family] less.” This is evident from Gen 29:30–31, where Jacob’s greater love for Rachel (29:30) is phrased as hating Leah (29:31, RSV). Compare also Deut 21:15–17, where the same love-hate dichotomy is used. (The KJV translated the Hebrew literally as love/hate, but the NIV and RSV have translated the Hebrew as loves/does not love and love/dislike.) Compare also 16:13, where a love-hate, devote-despise dichotomy describes preferring one master over another. A person who commits himself or herself to Christ will develop a greater love for both neighbor and family, although at times loving and following Christ may be seen as renunciation, rejection, or hate if the family does not share the same commitment to Christ.

Father and mother. “Father and mother” is the first of three matching sets. The Matthean parallel lacks “wife” in the second set and in the last set “brothers and sisters.” Compare 18:29 for a similar grouping.

Wife. Compare 14:20; 18:29.

Even his own life. Compare 9:23–24; 17:33; John 12:25. This is the fourth set in the series. For Luke’s love of “fours,” see comments on 6:22.

Cannot be my disciple. This refers to becoming a Christian, i.e., becoming a “disciple,” not to becoming an apostle or one of the “twelve disciples.” Matthew 10:37–38 uses these words in the same way, for the person not fulfilling these conditions “will not be worthy of Jesus” (10:37), which is further described as “losing one’s life” (10:39).

14:27 Does not carry his cross and follow me. This is the second condition for discipleship. Compare 9:23.

14:28 Suppose. The following similitudes illustrate the need to consider carefully what it means to become a Christian.

One of you. “One of you” is literally *Who out of you*. Compare 11:5, 11; 12:25; 15:4; 17:7; cf. also 14:31.

Build a tower. Compare 13:4. This may have served as a protection for a house or vineyard or was perhaps some sort of farm building (cf. Mark 12:1).

Estimate the cost. This term was used both for counting votes and for adding up numbers in business ledgers.

14:29 Will ridicule him. Compare 18:32; 22:63; 23:11, 36.

14:30 This is a derisive comment, a jeer, not a statement of fact.

This fellow. A derogatory use of the article “this.” The point of the similitude was not made explicit because it was self-evident. Do not promise to follow Jesus unless you understand the “cost” and are willing to “pay” it. This does not imply that salvation must be earned. Rather the point being made is that God’s grace can only be received by those who, in repenting, place him above everything else.

14:31 Or suppose a king. Whereas 14:28 has “one of you,” here Luke omitted “of you” because Israel had no king in his/Jesus’ day.

14:32 A delegation. Compare 19:14.

14:33 The third condition is described. A disciple must relinquish everything. Similar teachings are found in 12:33; 18:22; cf. also 5:11; 11:41. See comments on 5:28.

Give up. Compare 9:61, where the same term is used. The present tense emphasizes that this renunciation must be continual (see comments on 9:23).

14:34 If it loses its saltiness. The question arises about how salt can lose its taste, i.e., become insipid. Since this is a parable, the idea of salt becoming “unsalty” need not cause difficulty, even if in actuality this were not possible. However, the thought here may reflect the fact that most salt came from the Dead Sea and contained carnallite or gypsum. If carelessly processed, it would become insipid or poor tasting. Such salt was of little or no use; in fact, it was a distinct liability because it now had to be discarded. Although salt was used in sacrifices (Lev 2:13), here the focus is on its function as a seasoning. The verb “loses its saltiness” is translated everywhere else in the NT as “to become foolish.” Yet how can salt become “foolish”? It may be that the reality part of this analogy, which involves the “foolishness” of an unconsidered decision to follow Jesus, has intruded into the analogy itself, with the salt becoming equally worthless/foolish by losing its taste.

14:35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. Bad salt is worse than nothing. It has a negative value. It is a kind of environmental hazard, for it would ruin soil or even a manure pile. Sowing the earth with salt was the ultimate punishment for a defeated enemy.

He who has ears to hear. Compare Luke 8:8.

The Lukan Message

In this section Luke reiterated what is involved in becoming a Christian. The teaching, much like 9:23–27, 57–62; 18:24–30, deals with the “cost” of discipleship. Neither Jesus nor Luke encouraged an unthinking, impulsive “leap of faith” into discipleship. They emphasized instead that one should reflect on what the act of commitment involves. The three conditions described in this passage (hating one’s family, i.e., putting Jesus above all other relationships [14:26], bearing the cross and following Jesus [14:27], and renouncing possessions [14:33]) are repeated throughout Luke-Acts in a multitude of different images and terms. These include taking up the cross daily (9:23), leaving family (18:29), repenting (5:32; 10:13; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10), believing or having faith (7:50; 8:46; Acts 16:31), losing one’s life (Luke 9:24), repentance and being

baptized (Acts 2:38), hearing and doing God's will (Luke 8:21), acknowledging Christ (12:8), and entering the narrow door (13:24). These are all to be understood as complementary expressions of the same kind of commitment. None of them can be fulfilled without fulfilling the others. Luke made clear that the decision to follow Jesus must be made consciously, with full awareness of the implications (14:28–32; cf. 9:57–62). See Introduction 8 (6).

Since Luke was writing to Christian believers, however, (see Introduction 3), these teachings function somewhat differently than they did in Jesus' day. His purpose was to remind his Christian readers of what they had committed to Christ lest they minimize the scope of their obligation. Luke wanted his readers to know that Jesus provides no "cheap grace." It is cheap neither from the divine perspective nor from the human one. What it has cost, Jesus' death on the cross, was everything; and the response that enables us to receive that grace is likewise everything. Theophilus was to remember that it is not only the beginning of one's Christian life that is important but above all how one perseveres (8:14–15). A half-hearted discipleship is doomed.

This passage also contains a strong, if implicit, Christology. Jesus demands a position above all else in life. Even the basic sociological unit of society, the family, must not take priority over one's commitment to Jesus. Being a Christian is not primarily about adherence to a particular ethical teaching, although that is indeed involved; more than anything else it entails following Jesus (14:27). The absolute nature of this demand implies a high Christology indeed.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 14:25-35). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.