



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for February 24, 2008
Released on Wednesday, February 20, 2008**

“Summoned to Be a Disciple”

Lesson Text: Luke 14:25–33.

Read Background Scripture: Luke 14:25–33.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:1–6.

Luke 14:25–33

25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

TODAYS AIM

Facts: to be aware of the devotion Jesus expects and to see how two parables illustrate it.

Principle: to understand that being a disciple of Jesus demands perseverance and complete loyalty.

Application: to motivate believers to absolute faithfulness to Jesus Christ in all things.

How to Say It

AMBASSAGE. *am-buh-sij.*

INTRODUCTION

Our world contains many evidences of unfinished projects. Most of us can recall seeing an empty, concrete-block shell that should have become a building, surrounded by waist-high weeds. The four-lane highway that stops abruptly with a set of barricades, the half-painted house, and the partially completed book manuscript on the desk all testify to good intentions somehow gone awry. In many cases the project simply demanded more than was expected.

Scripture is filled with examples of persons who began well but did not have the spiritual stamina to end well. They were not necessarily "bad" people, but they allowed their weaknesses to seize control and negate good intentions and even previous good deeds.

Jesus was aware of this tendency in sinful human beings; so He warned prospective disciples to consider care-fully their motives and degree of commitment before deciding to follow Him. The sobering realities a Christian disciple has to face should cause one to count the cost before making a commitment to the One the world rejects.

QUESTIONS

Committing Our Essentials (Luke 14:25–27)

1. What were the circumstances in which Jesus gave instruction about discipleship (Luke 14:25)?

Jesus taught in a previous parable that multitudes should be invited into the kingdom (v. 23). It is noteworthy that, in spite of growing official opposition to His ministry, He was still popular among the common people.

Jesus knew that popular appeal was not the same as devotion. Even those who seemed to be giving wholehearted support needed to know what true discipleship would cost. So He used strong language to test their dedication.

This strong language was warranted for at least two reasons. First, opposition to Jesus had hardened, and He knew what lay ahead for both Himself and His followers. If they were to withstand this pressure, they had to make a clear choice. Jesus would ask them to renounce earthly relationships and even themselves.

Second, the people in these crowds were a mixed group with mixed motives. Some were curious onlookers; others were would-be followers. Even among the potential followers the motives varied. Some wanted Him to supply their physical needs. Indeed, some in Galilee had already tried to make Him king for this reason. Others hoped to see Him overthrow Roman rule. Still others were spiritually sincere but had no idea what discipleship cost.

In His omniscience He knew that many in the crowd did not have the required resolve to follow Him all the way. It would be better for them to not even begin the journey than to begin it only to fall by the wayside. For others, however, a knowledge of what lay ahead would strengthen their commitment. Both groups would at least have honest expectations.

2. How does Jesus' approach to the multitude differ from the response some churches have toward large crowds? What can churches do better to follow Jesus' example?

Sometimes churches and preachers get caught up in believing that a large crowd equals effectiveness and success. Crowds are considered a sign that God is blessing the work. This may be the case, but sometimes the crowds are the result of a spellbinding leader or a slick church production.

When the crowds arrive, some churches seek to cater to them in order to keep them. Yet Jesus did not mind making the crowds uncomfortable. He sought followers who were committed, not necessarily comfortable (see John 6:66). It is imperative that church leaders continually evaluate their motives and teaching to be sure people are not being manipulated and that doctrine is not being sacrificed.

3. In what sense did Jesus advocate hating one's relatives (v. 26)?

This seems to be a very hard saying. Is Jesus truly, literally commanding His disciples to *hate* their closest family members? Is a follower of Jesus required to despise one's *own life* in a very literal sense as well?

A key to understanding today's lesson is to appreciate a practice in speaking and writing known as *hyperbole*. Hyperbole is a technique widely used in the ancient world. It is still used often today. Hyperbole is defined as "deliberate exaggeration for the purpose of emphasis." Therefore, hyperbole should not be taken literally.

For example, one may say, "He talks on his cell phone constantly." We would not understand this to mean, "He uses his cell phone every second of every day." What this means is, "He uses his cell phone a lot—much more than most people." Hyperbole thus is not intended to be deceptive. Those who use hyperbole make their point by using a deliberate exaggeration that they expect people to recognize as such.

Jesus uses hyperbole frequently. Sometimes this is very easy to detect. For example, Jesus did not really think that people walked around with literal beams (planks of wood) stuck in their eyes (Luke 6:41, 42). To take such statements literally is to misunderstand what Jesus says. In other places, though, identifying hyperbole is not as easy. Today's lesson offers some statements of hyperbole, and this verse is one of them. We must be careful to understand such statements as Jesus intends.

To take the verse before us literally is to miss the nature of discipleship. What Jesus is stressing is that His disciples cannot have divided loyalties (compare Luke 16:13). He or she cannot play the role of disciple only when it is convenient. Commitment to Jesus demands that a disciple will choose to follow Him in even extreme circumstances. If someone is forced to choose between obeying Jesus or obeying his or her *father and mother*, then that person must choose Jesus (compare Deuteronomy 33:9; Matthew 10:37, 38). If the demands or expectations of our spouses would lead to violation of our commitment to Jesus, then we must choose Jesus.

This is not a call to abandon family relationships as a part of Christian discipleship. Christians can still be the best husbands, sisters, sons, and mothers possible. We can still love our families and cherish our relationships. But we cannot allow family loyalty to override our devotion to Jesus and His teachings.

Sadly, some new believers are forced to make this very choice. To be the only Christian in one's family may result in enormous pressure to compromise one's faith or to live a life of conditional discipleship. Right here is where the fellowship and support of the church becomes vital to successful discipleship.

4. What did bearing one's cross mean to prospective disciples (v. 27)?

Disciples of Jesus had to settle the issue of loyalty now because of what Jesus knew lay ahead. Families would be divided over Him (Luke 12:51-53). When that happened, His followers had to know on which side they would stand. Those who could not so commit themselves could not be His disciples.

Jesus likewise said, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after (follow) me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). This stipulation grew out of hating one's own life (v. 26), for a cross was an instrument of suffering and death. What does Jesus intend by this startling declaration? Does He mean that all true disciples will be asked to give up their lives for the sake of Jesus?

A true disciple had to be willing to face daily the prospect of suffering and death for Jesus' sake. When a condemned man carried his cross to the place of execution, he was thereby acknowledging the justice of the sentence laid upon him (though it might not be just at all). Jesus bore that disgrace, and every disciple subjected himself to the same disgrace in following Him.

To be a Christian martyr is to die for one's faith in Jesus. But this verse does not teach that we are less than true disciples if we are not slaughtered for the faith.

This is clarified when we compare the verse with Luke 9:23. There, Jesus equates taking "up his cross daily" with denying oneself (compare Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34). We die to self when we accept Jesus' call to discipleship. As Paul puts it, we are crucified with Him and He now lives in us, taking control of our lives (Galatians 2:19, 20).

Estimating the Expense (Luke 14:28-33)

5. What was the fate of the builder (and the disciple) who did not first calculate the cost (vs. 28-30)?

To stress the importance of weighing the consequences of discipleship carefully, Jesus gave two practical illustrations. The first was the man who made plans to build a tower. Towers were important as defenses against enemy attack in fortifications and walled cities. But sometimes private individuals, as here, built towers to protect their property, such as flocks and herds or vineyards.

But a tower was expensive. The prospective builder had to be sure he had enough money and materials to finish it. He could not just react to his need or his whim; he had to sit down and calculate the cost of materials and labor. Then he had to take stock of his resources to see whether he could afford it.

In the same way, a prospective disciple could ill afford to decide to follow Jesus on the basis of emotional attachment, intellectual curiosity, or temporary social influence. He needed to reflect on who Jesus was, what His demands were, and what lay ahead. Discipleship was surely worth the price it cost; but did the prospect have what it took to see it through?

In His illustration Jesus projected what would happen if the builder started his project without the resources to finish it. He would build the foundation and then discover he had run out of money. He would have no choice but to stop. And there the unfinished building would stand, a monument to the folly of a man who had not stopped to count the cost.

This failure would bring him not only personal embarrassment but also social ridicule. All who passed by would "begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:29-30).

The same fate awaits the person who hastily decides to follow Jesus. He plunges into building his life and joins others in building the church, but then he discovers there are costs he had not anticipated. He may lose status in the community, be hated by his

family, or face opposition at work. He finds that the Lord wants control over his time, speech, and money. He says, "I did not know it would be like this." So, running out of spiritual stamina, he either renounces his profession or contradicts it by the way he lives. Either way, he becomes a mockery because he has left the edifice of his life unfinished.

6. What difficult decision did the king in Jesus' parable have to make (vs. 31, 32)?

Jesus' second example of the need to weigh the consequences of discipleship was a king considering waging war. To succeed he must calculate whether he can win against his rival's larger force. The essential element in the illustration is again the need to count the cost before undertaking the endeavor.

The king in the story knows that his enemy has an army twice the size of his. He therefore sits down and deliberates whether there is any way he can defeat him. There have been many such victories against the odds, but the king cannot take victory for granted and rush into battle. His zeal is no substitute for good reasoning.

Upon thinking the matter through, if the king concludes that he cannot win with the resources he has, he would be better off sending a delegation to his rival to seek peace without fighting. This would not be desirable, and the terms of peace he would be able to negotiate might fall short of what he wants. But it is preferable to the disaster he would probably suffer in battle. Humiliating though it may be, this king concludes after counting the cost that he does not have what it takes to win.

This illustration had a potent message for prospective disciples. They had to know that casting their lot with Jesus would plunge them into a great conflict. Jesus' enemies were becoming ever stronger, and He would become more unpopular. Before long the forces against Him would greatly outnumber His dedicated followers. To outward appearances, His cause was doomed.

Jesus was thus warning those who were inclined to follow Him during His popularity that things would not always be this way. In light of overwhelming opposition in the future, they needed to sit down and deliberate whether or not they could remain loyal when defeat seemed certain.

7. What kind of warfare are Christians today involved in?

A battle is being fought today as well—a spiritual battle between Christ and the forces of darkness. His disciples are daily involved in this struggle against Satan, the world, and the flesh (Ephesians 6:10-13). They know that in spite of their Lord's past and future victories, they are presently outnumbered in the battle for truth, right, and purity. Pressures from their spiritual enemies are overwhelming.

Can we be faithful disciples in this atmosphere? Victory in Christ is certain in spite of the present odds, but we must daily claim it by faith (see John 16:33; 1 John 5:4).

8. What principle sums up Jesus' teaching on discipleship (v. 33)?

Our lesson ends with a principle that sums up Jesus' teaching throughout this entire passage. Whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be Jesus' disciple. At first this may seem to be merely a call to renounce all material possessions, and surely it includes that. Nothing can be more damaging to discipleship than attachment to one's possessions, and the prospective disciple must decide where his affections lie (Matt. 6:24).

Jesus does not demand of everyone, as He did of the rich young ruler, that they sell everything and give to the poor (Luke 18:22). But He does ask that we renounce our right to own things. We hold all things as stewards of their true Owner. Unless our possessions are yielded to Him, our discipleship will always be half-hearted.

But Jesus' principle goes beyond material possessions to *anything* that we might hold dear. It covers those family relationships of which He spoke earlier (Luke 14:26) as well as our claim to life itself (vs. 26-27). Whatever would lay claim to our affections and loyalty must be subordinated to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Paul understood this principle and practiced it (see Philippians 3:4-8). Do we?

CONCLUSION

The Cost of Discipleship

Does the cost of following Jesus ever become too great? Are we willing to let Jesus be Lord in some area of our lives but not in others? The Gospels teach that the earliest disciples of Jesus gave up *everything* to follow Him (see Mark 10:28; Luke 5:11).

To be a disciple of Christ means that we may be asked to give up ownership of the most private and precious things we have. This means that anything and everything is on the table, especially material possessions and relationships. To hold back in any area means we have not totally yielded to Jesus' lordship, and we are not truly His disciples (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

Jesus does not want people to commit to being His disciples without understanding the depth of that commitment. Discipleship must be more than "try it, you'll like it." Jesus is looking for fully devoted followers.

One of the great martyrs of the twentieth century was a German minister named Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945). During the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany, Bonhoeffer published an important book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937). In this he challenges Christians to understand that being a follower of Jesus requires full commitment of one's life under any circumstance.

A few years later, Bonhoeffer had these principles put to the test. He was arrested by the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police) for treason and sent to a concentration camp. There he ministered to his fellow prisoners under extreme pressure. His commitment to Jesus allowed him to go to his own execution calmly, secure in his relationship with his Lord.

Jesus' teachings in today's lesson offer us the opportunity to reexamine our commitment to Him. Would an outsider describe you as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Does anyone look at your life and see a fully devoted follower of Christ? What or who is more important to you than your relationship with Jesus? Such questions of self-reflection are important in our attempts to evaluate our commitment.

In Revelation 3:16, Jesus offered a different type of comment on this same issue: the lukewarm church or Christian will be spewed from His mouth. This is a comment about discipleship and commitment. Jesus is not pleased with those who serve Him a little. He does not seek our lukewarm commitments. He desires men and women to be His disciples who will count the cost of commitment and then pay the price—whatever the price.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Full commitment still required!

PRAYER

God, our Father, You have demonstrated Your commitment to us by sending Your Son to pay the price for our sins. You have asked us, through Jesus, to be committed to You and obedient to Your will.

This is not always easy, Father. May You continue to bless our desire to seek and follow Your will. May our lives continue to be conformed to Your will by the power of Your Word and Your Holy Spirit. We pray this in the name of our master, Jesus Christ, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next quarter's lessons deal with God's covenant with the people of Israel. While such a theme could begin much earlier, our lessons will start with King David. The ark had been without a home for many years, and next week we will study how David brought the ark to Jerusalem. Study **1 Chronicles 15:1-28 "The Ark Brought to Jerusalem"** to prepare.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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