

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Dear Father, we are thankful for your Word, which is so clear, so precious. And, at times it is very challenging. But, we know that you challenge us for our own good. May our time this morning be a blessing to you. Speak clearly through me as I expound on the passage just read. May you knead the truths of today's message deep into our hearts as we commit them to you. In Christ's name, Amen.*

Church, I am so honored and blessed to be here this morning. HCC has been such a tremendous spiritual family for me, Stacy and our three boys. Thank you all for your love and support over the years. Although many of our brothers and sisters are at English Retreat today, I am excited to continue our exploration of Luke. Today's passage does not fall squarely in the "Meals with Jesus" series, but it is directly sandwiched between last week's and next week's messages. So, by God's providence, I have the privilege of speaking to you about the cost of discipleship.

Our Lord Jesus at the height of his popularity, turned to the massive crowds thronging about him and spoke plainly about how hard and costly it is to follow him. This seems so counter-intuitive to what we would do if trying to attract people and keep their attention.

Imagine if Steve Jobs, when introducing the iPhone to the world for the first time fifteen years ago at the highly anticipated and jampacked Apple Event, said something like this:

"Every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along that changes everything... Today, Apple is going to reinvent the phone... We want to make smartphones even harder to use. What we want to do is make a leapfrog product that is way more costly and difficult to use than any mobile device has ever been. It will make your life really difficult. This is what iPhone is."

Such words would be insanity. Yet, that is essentially the route our Lord went down. **Why?**

I think our Lord knew our temptation of presenting Christianity and discipleship as all benefits with no cost. The latest Public Religion Research Institute survey released in July of this year indicated that 71% of Americans self-identify as Christian.<sup>1</sup> How is it then that despite 7 out of 10 people in society claiming to be Christian that our influence in the world is fading and so weak? It is because we have failed to grasp and live out the truth that Christianity is a *costly faith*. That has led to disciple-making that is incomplete, imbalanced and harmful.

Last week, Minister Henry helped us understand from the Parable of the Great Banquet the need to invite outsiders to fellowship with us. Now, that parable also introduced the possibility that one's ties to possessions and family might disqualify him from enjoying the feast. In our passage, which immediately follows that parable, Jesus shows the reality of allegiance to one's family and possessions as impediments to authentic discipleship. He is being crystal clear about the high cost of being his disciple.

While becoming Jesus' disciple costs you nothing, *being* one will cost you everything. Seems a bit paradoxical, right? How can the gospel both be free and costly at the same time? How can what was freely offered to me (salvation) lead to a life that is so costly (discipleship)? Our text this morning will help clarify this puzzling truth by encouraging us to **embrace the cost of discipleship in light of the cross**.

To get from wherever you are today to *embracing* the cost of discipleship, we need to go through three steps. First, we need to *recognize* the cost of discipleship in light of what Jesus says. From learning the cost, we then, secondly, *count* the cost of discipleship in light of who Jesus is. After weighing the cost

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prrri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>

and seeing Jesus as worthy, we can then embrace the cost of discipleship in light of what Jesus has done. A gentle warning, this is one of Jesus' hard sayings, so it will be challenging to hear. You may feel yourself pushing back on my words, but I hope the Spirit will soften your hearts and help you be even more committed to Christ because he is worthy of our all.

## II. MAIN POINT 1: RECOGNIZE THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP IN LIGHT OF WHAT JESUS SAYS

In order to embrace the cost of discipleship, you must first understand know what that cost is. Three times in our passage, in verses 26, 27 and 33, our Lord ends with the phrase "cannot be my disciple." These three statements inform us of what it will cost to follow him. **These three costs are relational, reputational, and material.** But before delving in, I must first set the scene for this extraordinary teaching.

### a. Setting the Scene (v. 25)

In verse 25 we read, "Now great crowds accompanied him." Even though Jesus attracted huge crowds, he is not interested in numbers. You see, it's easy to blend in the crowd and fake allegiance without real commitment. You can be invisible at Minute Maid Park and have no interest in baseball, yet people will think you are cheering for the Astros. But, Jesus here is sifting the crowds to distinguish the bandwagon disciples from loyal ones.

Now, this begs the question: who exactly is a disciple? **A disciple is a pupil or student.** In ancient times, disciples would sit at the feet of a great teacher and follow him around. Think of a Jedi and his padawan (apprentice), if you're into Star Wars, or, if you're in the medical field, an attending physician and her resident. So, a disciple is a learner, a follower. A disciple *of Christ* then is a learner and follower of Jesus.

### b. Relational Cost: Jesus must be worth more than all people and personal relationships (v. 26)

Moving to verse 26, we read, "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." From this verse, we recognize that the first cost of discipleship is **relational**. Put another way, **Jesus must be worth more than all the people and personal relationships in your life.** This means, we are to treasure Jesus above *all* our other affections. He is not simply to be first among equals. To be his disciple, the answer to the question, "Is Jesus my greatest treasure?", must be an unqualified "Yes."

The word that leaps out at us is "hate." It is jarring to see and hear that verb. Yet, Jesus is purposefully using this shocking verb to grab our attention. But, must we really *hate* those who are closest to us? Doesn't Jesus say to love our enemies? Isn't the second greatest commandment to love your neighbor as yourself? Yes and yes. But here, Jesus is not saying we must actually hate one's parents. Not only would that contradict what he taught earlier, it would also violate the fifth commandment about honoring one's parents (Ex 20:12); cf Eph 6:1-2). Jesus' use of "hate" here is hyperbole and a Hebraism (or Jewish idiom). What he is really saying is that the love you have for those closest to you, when compared to the love you have for him, will seem like "hate" because of your supreme loyalty and devotion to him. In short, your love for Christ makes all your other loves pale in comparison.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This is what he says in Matthew 10:37, which is a parallel passage to today's text: "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."

I once had an exchange with my father that forced me to recognize the relational cost of being a disciple of Christ. He thought my love for Jesus was hatred toward him and he hated God for it. During one Christmas a few years after I became a believer, my dad yelled, “God has stolen my son from me...I don’t even know you, because you’re not my son!” “You were a wasted birth!”, he raged as he stormed out of the room, his words slicing through the air like verbal knives, leaving me with a searing pain in my chest. I tried to fight back tears but couldn’t. The sorrow was overwhelming. I remember sitting there alone, having been berated by my father, whom I had always wanted to please and be proud of me, for being a follower of Jesus. All I could do at that moment was cry out for mercy, strength and hope in Jesus. But, despite such rejection, I knew that I could not forsake my Lord. I knew that the best way of loving my father was to love God first.

Moving on, Jesus ups the ante by saying his disciple must **hate even his own life**. What does that mean? Hating yourself is not self-loathing. It is a call to set aside the relationships that previously made up your identity and reconstruct that identity within the new community that is oriented toward God’s purposes (Green, 351). Your primary identity is no longer along familial bloodlines but defined by the blood of Christ. Christ said, “He who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Lk 9:24; Jn 12:25). Verse 26 is getting at the same truth. So, in summary, there is a relational cost in being a disciple of Christ. **You need to make Jesus your number one priority if you are to follow him**. Otherwise, you cannot be his disciple.

**c. Reputational Cost: Jesus must be worth more than all plans and personal reputation (v. 27)**

Jesus has already said his disciple must hate his own life, but in verse 27, he ratchets up the intensity even more by saying his disciple must sacrifice his own life. “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” From this verse, we see there is also a reputational cost to being a Christian. **Jesus must be worth more than all your plans and personal reputation**.

In ancient Rome, the cross was an instrument of torture and execution. To “bear one’s cross” meant you were identified as a criminal worthy of death. When we bear our cross, we are telling the world that we agree with God’s verdict that we are guilty sinners who are under his authority. More than that, we publicly say we will suffer and even be crucified for him. I like how A.W. Tozer described what it meant for a man to be crucified. First, he is facing only one way. Second, he is not going back. And finally, he has no further plans of his own. Beloved, while we may glibly say “I have been crucified with Christ,” do we truly know what that means?

As a disciple of Christ, **we have no plans of our own**. We also prize Jesus more than our personal reputation. Let’s be real: following Jesus may mean enduring false accusations, shame and ridicule. Bearing one’s cross is the epitome of shame and condemnation. And that is exactly what Jesus is calling his disciples to do.

**d. Material Cost: Jesus must be worth more than all possessions and personal rights (v. 33)**

Finally, in addition to a relational and reputational cost, Jesus wants us to recognize a third cost in being his disciple: a material cost. **Jesus must be worth more than all your possessions and personal rights**. At the end of our passage in verse 33, our Lord says: “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Our possessions may be “potentially the most destructive thing for discipleship” (Bock, 1290). Our material belongings, our “stuff,” can have an unusually strong grip on our sense of well-being, status and satisfaction. But, Jesus commands his disciples to “renounce” or cast away not just some or most, but *all that he has*. This does not necessarily mean we have to sell all

our possessions and be poor, but it does mean we must be at any moment ready to let go of everything for Jesus' sake.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus did not die on the cross for us to enjoy the pleasures of Houston and the riches of this world. To the contrary, Jesus warned in the Parable of the Sower how the “deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things” choke the seed of faith that was sown, making it unfruitful (Mk 4:19). Paul says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). We cannot worship both God and money (Mt 6:24). There's no negotiating with Jesus here. It's either all him or nothing. There is no saying, “Well, if the cost reaches this high, then I'm no longer interested in Jesus anymore.” Thankfully though, there are people who can show us otherwise.

Last weekend, a group of us from HCC had the privilege of going to Louisiana to help with Hurricane Ida disaster relief through the organization Samaritan's Purse. One of homeowners we served was Charmain. Charmain had gone through a lot. Her husband suffered a heart attack, her home had water damage and mold from the storm, and she caught COVID badly. She was bound to a wheelchair and needed an oxygen tank to breathe. We were glad to help her out however she needed and entered her home wanting to bless her. But, turns out she was the one blessing us. She greeted us and said, “Y'all young people have to remember that all this stuff (pointing around) is going to go boom one day...it'll all be gone. Don't put your hope in material things, but only in the Lord.” Charmain said she didn't know if she'd get better, but it really didn't matter to her because she knew whom she served. I think of Charmain when I think of someone saying to Jesus, “Lord, even though the cost of following you is so high, I am willing to renounce all I have to follow you.”

How about you? Will you do the same? How do you renounce your possessions for Jesus' sake? One practical way is to look at your budgets. Ask the Spirit to truly examine your heart: “Is my desire to stay comfortable and at ease and to enjoy the wealth that I possess keeping me from throwing myself wholly into the work of the kingdom and following after Christ?” I recognize there are some of you who are in financial tight spots or still in school, but even then, please consider in your heart: “Is my desire to achieve or maintain a certain lifestyle keeping me from contributing my all to the cause of Christ?”

Specifically, let me offer one small way to lessen the grip of riches on our lives. Once in a while, instead of ordering a drink with your meal, or a coffee or bubble milk tea, say to yourself, “Not for me, but for Christ.” Save the funds you would have spent on that drink and set it aside to support our church, a missionary or ministry organization. Yes, I know it will be weird to say, “Not for me, but for Christ,” as you wait in line at Sharetea (my boba shop of choice!) and then discreetly exit the premises, but it is a small reminder to “renounce” material goods so that we may be a more committed disciple of Christ. Start small, with a drink, and see how the Lord will grow this mentality to larger and larger things.

### III. MAIN POINT 2: COUNT THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP IN LIGHT OF WHO JESUS IS

So, we've taken the first step toward embracing the cost of discipleship by recognizing the three costs that Jesus identifies: relational, reputational and material. The second step is this: Now that we *know* the costs, we are to count them. **Is it worth following Jesus after he's so clearly shown us what it will cost?**

#### a. Jesus' Illustrations on Counting the Cost (vv 28-32)

In verses 28 to 32, Jesus uses two illustrations of his own to highlight the importance of counting the cost of discipleship. First, in verses 28-30, there is the parable of the tower-builder. It's a pretty straightforward message: If you willingly start a building project, you have to count the cost and plan well,

otherwise you won't be able to finish. And, Jesus says all who see your half-built tower will "mock" you as a fool (v 29). I'm sure our thoughtful Building Committee has paid close attention to this parable.

In verses 29-32, Jesus shares the parable of the king who finds himself under attack. He only has half the army of the attacking king. He must come up with a strategy or else perish. Any wise king would count the cost before going into battle. If he knows he cannot win, it would be suicidal to engage. Instead, he would find a way to save his people by asking for terms of peace.

These two parables are about counting the cost. Friends, **you too must assess and weigh the costs** to see if you are ready to take on the personal commitment and sacrifice required to follow Christ. You might wonder how can you do that when you don't know what's coming in your life. Well, Jesus requires, upfront, a commitment to the *highest possible cost*. Imagine the highest cost you might have to pay and assume that is what Jesus will require of you.

#### **b. Two Concerns: Discipleship as Crushing and Transactional**

If you some of you feel a bit overwhelmed or squirmish now, I don't blame you. As mentioned earlier, this is a hard saying of Christ. His words are extreme and intentionally so. And I can anticipate at least two concerns that perhaps are churning in your mind. The first is that **discipleship is too hard**; it's crushing. The second is that it **seems transactional**. Let me briefly address these two understandable concerns.

First, discipleship indeed is crushing *if we resist the yoke of Christ*. Yes, the command of Jesus to be his disciple is impossibly hard for those who try to resist it. But if you willingly submit, his yoke is easy, and his burden is light (Mt 11:28-30).<sup>3</sup> We do this by relying on the Holy Spirit. He is the one who empowers us to surrender and submit, not strain and struggle. He helps us revere the Son's command not as crushing, but as liberating. Also, be encouraged that **discipleship is a process**. We are to "walk in him" (Col 2:6-7). It may be that we take two steps forward, one step back, and then three steps forward, two steps back, etc. But, so long as the overall direction is forward, we are growing as authentic disciples. Discipleship is a continuation not perfection.

The second concern is even more important, which is that when counting the cost it's far too easy for us to make discipleship transactional in nature. In response, it is helpful to recount something Pastor Jason has mentioned in the past, which is the difference between "**cost of purchase**" versus "**cost of surrender**." The attacking king in Jesus' parable could say to the other king, "Pay me a tribute and give me half your land, and I'll leave you alone." That is buying peace; it is the cost of purchase. But, that king could also say, "You are utterly defeated, but I will allow you to live in peace and security and even joy if you surrender your autonomy and everything to me." That is an even higher cost, the cost of surrender.

#### **c. One Response: Jesus is Worthy of Our All**

Well, beloved, Jesus is a warring king, but he is warring *for us* against death, sin and Satan. And he has achieved the victory against all those forces. Yet, remember we too were once enemies of God. We were utterly defeated and dead in our sins (Eph 2:5). But, Jesus is the gracious king and is willing to

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<sup>3</sup> Consider also what Jerry Bridges writes in *Discipline of Grace* about the gospel being a motivation to help us not think discipleship is crushing: "It is only the joy of hearing the gospel and being reminded that our sins are forgiven in Christ that will keep the demands of discipleship from becoming drudgery. It is only gratitude and love to God that comes from knowing that He no longer counts our sins against us (Romans 4:8) that provides the proper motive for responding to the claims of discipleship".

pardon and rescue us *if we surrender to him*. The gospel is this message of grace. It is not about paying or bargaining for your life, but rather accepting the free gift of eternal life *by surrendering your all to Christ*.

And why would we do such a thing? **Because Jesus is worthy of our all**. When we truly consider who Jesus is, we will lovingly embrace the cost of discipleship. Jesus deserves our superior love because he gives a superior reward: himself. He is what makes heaven, heaven. Heaven is about seeing Jesus face-to-face in the fullness of his glory and holiness. It is hearing his voice directly and without any distortion by our sin. It is enjoying his very presence as we worship him with countless saints and angels, all in one great chorus crying out, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev 5:12). Amen?

#### IV. MAIN POINT 3: EMBRACE THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP IN LIGHT OF WHAT JESUS DID

Church, we have understood not just what embracing the cost of discipleship is, but also why we should. Recall we listened to what Jesus said about the three costs of discipleship. Then, we counted the cost and asked if it’s worth it. We found out, yes, it is worth it because of who Jesus is. Now, I want to exhort you to **embrace the cost by remembering what Jesus did**.

When Jesus turned to address the great crowds, he was on his way to Jerusalem where he would be crucified for us. His first words to the crowd were these: “If anyone comes to me.” “Anyone” is a broad invitation to come to him. He will not cast out anyone who comes to him (John 6:37). While being his disciple costs us everything, becoming one cost *him* everything. We must never forget the high cost at which we were bought, the price of his blood (1 Cor 6:19-20). And he paid that price out of love.

To my **unbelieving friends**, will you become a disciple of Christ? Jesus purchased you at the cost of his blood. He laid his life down for you so that you would follow him, be reconciled to God and have life to the fullest. I call on you today to repent of your sins and place your trust in him. Do not delay. While it is costly to follow Christ, consider too the cost of not doing so. If you refuse to believe, know that only the just judgment and wrath of God against your sin awaits. So, choose Christ!

To **those of you who may be somewhat jaded or indifferent**, I urge you not to let your heart go untouched by today’s message. I ask you, out of sincere love, “Have you really considered the cost of being Jesus’ disciple?” Do not be content to be involved with the cause of Christ just enough to be respectable, but not enough to be uncomfortable. Do not make your faith a “great, soft cushion” that changes shape to suit your convenience (Stott). You may be lukewarm in your faith because you know Jesus only as Savior, but not Lord. You see, it does not cost you anything for Jesus to be your *Savior*, but costs you everything for him to be your *Lord*.

If you have walked with Christ *only* as your Savior, as your ticket to heaven or insurance from hell, and not also as your Lord, who has every right to demand from you what he desires...then, perhaps you have not been walking with Christ at all. You have followed Jesus on your own terms, not on his. I think one reason why Jesus says not all who say “Lord, Lord” will enter heaven is because those who say “Lord, Lord” have not actually followed Jesus as Lord (Mt 7:21). They pay lip service, but their lives tell a different story. Jesus says those who do the will of the Father will enter heaven because the work of God is to believe in his Son whom he has sent as both Lord and Savior (Jn 6:29). It is time for you to be reawakened to the glorious love that Christ has for you, which makes the high cost of following him possible.

Finally, to **those of you who have faithfully walked with Christ**, praise the Lord for your perseverance. It is so beautiful and precious. You know how being a disciple is costly. But, I pray that you, as children of God, will keep persevering with joy. Jesus says that anyone who has left possessions and family for his sake and for the gospel will receive a hundredfold “now in this time” and “in the age to come

eternal life” (Mk 10:29-30). Jesus is faithful to his promises. Let that sustain you when you feel like giving up because it is too demanding.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The more costly something is, the more valuable it is. **Anything of worth exacts a cost.** Parents, especially if you stay at home, raising children is costly. Professionals, working hard on a project at work is costly. Students, writing a thesis for class is costly. All these things are valuable, but they require sacrifice. To all of you, I encourage you to keep following Jesus even though it is hard because he is of infinite worth. The price we pay in being his disciple is real, but Christ is our priceless treasure.

In light of the cross, we cherish who Jesus is and what he has done for us and will do when he returns. With the cross before us, **we can embrace the cost of discipleship and proclaim: “Whether by life or by death, may God be magnified in our bodies!”** Let us pray.

*Father, help us to embrace the cost of discipleship because you have embraced us with your love. We too easily forget the truth that following Christ is a costly road. Forgive us for such oversight. Grant us fresh motivation and perseverance to bear our own cross, to fix our eyes on Jesus and to surrender our all for the cause of Christ. Bless all who are here that they may come to and after Christ. For, he is worthy of all honor and glory. He is worthy of our all because he gave us himself. For that, we are eternally grateful and rejoice. In Jesus’ priceless name I pray, Amen.*